A Quarterly of New Literature

ACCENT

HARRY LEVIN: Literature as an Institution

MORTON IRVING SEIDEN: An Essay on Yeats

BERTOLT BRECHT: Three Ballads

BEN FIELD: Smelts Are Running

S. RAIZISS: John Donne Today

HOWARD NUTT: The Apple Man

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NEW DIRECTIONS

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ACCENT
A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE
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BEN FIELD:

Smelts Are Running

Paul tried to ignore the tooth, but the pain grew worse. It almost doubled him up one night on his way from work. When he got to his room, he poured himself a little of the rye which he kept for colds and played it around in his mouth. He pulled at his lips as if he could tear them apart, glowering at the drawn face which blazed to the world that he couldn't take it. The tooth was a molar, too difficult for him to extract himself.

Having a few minutes left before night school, he dumped his weary body into the chair before his reading table. The whiskey had turned the pain into a dull throb. Two prints flanked the books on the table—a picture of Humboldt, the physicist, and Rembrandt's Lesson in Anatomy. Slowly men and corpse blurred.

The air bled out of him. He started up with a ringing in his ears. The landlady stood in the doorway smiling. "Call for you, Paul." He stumbled groggily downstairs.

"Do you know you got a sister, Paulie?" It was Freeda. Her whimper went through him like the sound of a knife sharpened on the edge of a pot. "Night and day—."

"God," he cried, "again!"

"Now, Paulie, do you think I'd bother you if you acted like you was flesh and blood? Remember what Mama said before she passed away, may she rest

in peace? Throw out of your heart the stone you got against the world."

"Don't teach me please!"

"You haven't seen the baby yet. Honest, Paulie, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. And Manny says he'll look at your teeth if you have trouble. Come Friday night and stay over. You'll eat a good Jewish meal once in a jubilee, like Mama used to say."

He rose, jarring the phone.

"Paulie, please. You can go fishing, too. Smelts is running."

"Let them run."

As he raced back to his room, the clock struck. He would be dead late for his course. He poked his head under the coldwater faucet, and with his hair dripping and his coat and books in his arms, he dashed into the street.

At the job next morning his face was swollen and his eyes bloodshot. A cabby, coming in for a cup of coffee, asked where he had gotten the chew tobacco he was hugging so hard to his cheek. The tooth worked such havoc with him that in desperation he was forced to ask the night-man if he would let him have a couple of hours to get it yanked.

"Any time," said Anderson, a good-natured yokel whose be-all and end-all were his job and girl. "We been working together years, Paul, and you ain't taken five minutes off that I can remember. You done me a good turn plenty times. Christ, I can do the same for you if you'd only ask. Yeh, I forgot to tell you your sister called up again last night. Why by all that's holy, son, don't you take a day off and get them holes plugged?"

Returning from the lunchroom after a day of torture, Paul found a letter from Freeda on his table. The writing was smeared: she had probably cried over it like the watering pot that she was. She begged, she promised she would not get on his nerves if he came. Manny was dying to see him, as were the children.

A poultice reduced the swelling, but other teeth started aching. Paul dreaded going to a local dentist who would order him back for a number of visits; he had neither time nor money for that. Reluctantly, he decided he might as well take advantage of the invitation. A change of air would do him good; for weeks now he had been driving himself to stay awake nights to do his college work. Freeda would stop those confounded calls that had the boss grumbling, and Manny's work on his teeth would more than make up for the loss of a day's pay and the fare.

After making the necessary arrangements with the night man, Paul took the train Friday evening at the Grand Central to the Westchester town in which his sister had settled after her marriage. The train was packed with commuters, well-fed, well-dressed people who didn't seem to have a worry or thought in their heads. Shoved into a corner, he tried to read the physics book which he had taken along, but after a while gave it up as a bad job. A couple of girls were chattering and glancing his way, attracted by the tall, neat, stern-looking boy; he plucked his faded gray hat over his face and closed his eyes. Not to waste time, he reviewed in his mind, step by step, a demonstration of

Huyghen's Principle, which he had carried out in the lab before the class. A glow passed over him as he recalled the professor's praise and the admiring comments of the students.

It was raining when he got out at the station. Paul shoved his precious book under his coat and headed for midtown in the downpour.

Manny's office was on the first floor of a bank building on Main Street. The door at the end of the long hall was open, and the familiar voice with the self-satisfied purr could be heard all over the place. The first objects to catch Paul's eye as he entered the waiting room were the porcelain figure and the fish bowl that he knew so well. This was the bowl with the fishing boy which his mother had bought years ago to liven up her millinery shop.

A curette poked out of the inner office, followed by Manny's round sleek face. "Well, well, look whom the cat's drug in at last. Come in and shake hands with Williams, Phar. D., phard, also exalted ruler of our Elks. This is Freeda's kid brother going into surgery so hot and fast he's burning up the East River."

As Williams heaved up a slab of a hand, the towel slipped off his chest, revealing the elk's tooth and a heavy gold watch-chain. "Glad to meet you, young fella," he said, and then he continued in a booming voice, "So, as I was saying, doc, that consignment of bromo seltzer turned brown. The hold of the freighter was too warm. The company sued for sixty grand. This fella, Allen, gets the temperature of the hold and tries fresh bromo in it. It didn't turn any more brown than my tookis. Just as simple as all that. The rube takes fifty dollars for saving sixty grand. Mind you: fifty dollars!"

Manny swung around, aghast

"That ain't the half of it, doc. Shipment of cigars from Manila turns bad in transit. Barrels of dough involved. This is a tough nut to crack. But Allen finds the cigars was mildewed on account of fungus picked up on the Islands. The check I cashed for him wasn't a cent more than the first."

Manny stabbed out his toelike fingers. "It's fellas like that teach the companies to get away with murder. Fellas like that," he repeated angrily as if he himself had lost a fat fee.

Paul was standing in a corner of the office examining a model of a jaw on the wall. He said quietly, "I wouldn't mind meeting that Allen."

They gawked at him.

"I think a man could take a leaf out of his book."

"Huh," blurted Williams in disgust, blowing out his big chest.

"You talk like a kid," added Manny patronizingly.

Paul shrugged his shoulders. "Let me never grow up then." He turned again to the model of the jaw and remained silent during the rest of the conversation.

After Williams had left, Manny examined Paul. "I think I can save that tooth. Let's give the swelling a chance to go down." He applied some medication and then ogled his watch. "Freeda'll have a cat fit, it's so late. I'll take care of you first crack out of the box tomorrow. You won't know you have a

tooth in your head when I get through."

Manny's sleek red sedan was parked in front of the bank building. He drove at sixty-five in the rain, skidding around the corners and cutting in and out of the traffic on the post road. "I know the whole police force here. There isn't a man around isn't my friend. God is always with me." He laughed at the reference to the Hebrew meaning of his name, an old crack of his. He came to a stop so quickly that they were thrown against each other. They were in front of a bungalow lighted up by a bulb like a large breast exhaust.

A heavy woman rushed out and fell on Paul, throwing herself on him as if she were trying to bring him down. She held him off for a better look, only to embrace him again. "Oh, Paulie, Paulie!" Wiping her eyes with her hand, Freeda turned to Manny. "Have you looked at his teeth?"

"Tomorrow first thing I'll do a real job on him." Manny was squatting before the radio.

"I knew. Didn't you say you would fix his teeth?"

"A couple of hours won't kill me," muttered Paul, cutting her short.

Having got his favorite crooner on the radio, Manny led Paul upstairs to the children's room which smelled of powder and fish oil. Two chubby kids were asleep in their cribs breathing through clogged noses. "How do you like our products, patents pending?" asked Manny. He showed Paul the rest of the bungalow, including the basement with its pingpong table.

At dinner Freeda had Paul sit next to her. She presided at the table with all the airs of the consort of an up-and-coming dentist, apologizing for having fired the maid because she had been fresh; they would have a new one Monday. She had rouged her cheeks, and all through the meal she kept pushing out her breasts as she repeated the virtues of her stuffed fish, the noodle soup, the roast duck in its puddle of sauce. "Why are you picking? Look at him—pick, pick, pick!"

Manny looked. "The same old boy. Still in training?"

Paul nodded curtly.

Manny heaped up his own plate. "All right, you do the fighting. I'll enjoy myself in a ringside seat."

"Pick, pick. You don't have to save money here," cried Freeda. "Paulie, please."

Paul continued eating sparingly.

Gulping down his last piece of lemon meringue pie, Manny hurried to the living room. He turned on the radio and fell into an easy chair. "This is the life, kid. Here's the pattern for all wise men to follow."

Paul stood stiffly before the fireplace with his shoulders hunched up. He watched the sparks fly upwards, die, and other sparks hurry to take their places. There was no end to it.

"Still the same boy, never throwing words away." Manny settled himself deeper in the easy chair and lit a stogie. "I hear they're raising the requirements for some of the Grade A med schools. They're putting up more bars to keep the Jewish lads out. Twelve out of thirteen are thrown on the dump."

Here was a subject Paul had done some thinking about. He opened up. "Too many Jewish boys without the brains to be plumbers are going into medicine. Medicine's no science to them: it's like selling shoes, soup greens, or something like that. Jew or no Jew, if you've got the stuff, you'll make it."

Manny shook his head doubtfully. "Our rabbi gave us a talk in the temple couple of weeks back about Anti-Semitism and the colleges. He's a sparkplug. He had the figures. Freeda got so excited she called you up the minute we got back from his talk. She's been on your tail since."

"She doesn't have to lose any sleep over me," said Paul.

Manny raised his puffy eyelids, regarded him for a moment, and grinned. With a contented grunt, as if all these problems were far behind him now, he reached for the radio dial. The phone rang. He answered it, and called out, "They got a new model at the show room. I'm trading in my sedan. Take it easy, kid. I'll be back soon."

Paul pulled off his shoes and socks and sat before the fireplace. The shoes were thin and patched; Paul had put a couple of half-moon pieces of iron on each shoe to save the leather. He relaxed, thrust his feet towards the fire. His tooth had stopped aching, but he felt depressed and tired, and the duck kept coming up on him.

From the kitchen where she was at her dishes, Freeda fired a whole belt of questions at him. She asked about his room, the landlady, the relatives whom he avoided like the plague. As his answers did not come freely, she walked in with her towel. At the sight of his bare feet, she cried, "Paulie, you'll catch your death of cold! Don't you have rubbers?"

Paul closed his eyes wearily.

She bent over him and stroked his knee apologetically. "I'm still your sister, Paulie. Why must you act like nothing bothers you? You used to be so different. Now you make yourself hardboiled. It ain't natural being that way, cutting yourself off from everybody like with a knife."

He stifled a yawn.

"For God's sake, Paulie, why don't you talk?"

"What is there to say?" he muttered in vexation. "I go to work, come home, go to school. That's my life."

"You ought to give yourself a chance. You drive yourself too much. And that lunchroom, it's no place for a nice intelligent boy to be working. Those bums and loafers—."

He picked up his wet shoes. "I'm tired, Freeda. I'd like to go to sleep, please."

Her face fell. "I hope you didn't catch cold." She went before him and stopped at the foot of the stairs where two rubber plants stood in green tubs. "Remember them? Remember when you were a skinny little boy and you used to call these buds red peppers and you always wanted to give them castor oil?"

She hurried upstairs into the spare bedroom where she pounded the pillows and laid out a pair of yellow pajamas. "They're your size, extra long. I bought

them special for you. Sleep well, Paulie. Tomorrow we'll talk."

He closed the door behind her and undressed. There was a picture on the dresser—his mother's. Just like Freeda to put it there to soften him. He turned his back on the fearful bulbous eyes and the pricked face.

Eagerly he opened his book to the chapter on refraction, one of the most exciting subjects in his physics course. He sat on the edge of the bed, swinging one leg as he read. His page darkened suddenly. The words blurred and flew up at him, like a swarm of black flies. He let himself down on the bed. His head cleared, his breathing became even. He found his pulse normal.

As he rested, goaded by his impatience to get back to his book after this strange attack of nausea, memory fluttered and flashed before him like a ribbon. Again he saw the millinery shop and his meek mother's ecstasy when Freeda became engaged; the wedding to which Manny's family flocked to eat a good meal; Freeda's triumphant return from the honeymoon with the little rag to show that her furniture had been intact; the last cent squeezed out of the store, out of the insurance policy, and everyone raided and despoiled to help that great catch—a dentist.

Strange that these memories should spin so vividly before him now. He must be off his guard to let the past crowd his brain so. To hell with the past! He was forever free of the curdle of a mother's milk and tears. Nor was there anything else these two could take from him now, nothing at all.

Paul finished his chapter and reviewed it carefully though he still felt the after effects of the nausea. Before getting under the blankets, he flung open all the windows.

The squawking of the radio downstairs woke him next morning. The soreness was almost gone from his jaw. He leaped out of bed, kneaded his stomach which was good to the touch, as flat as a board, did one hundred push-ups from the floor, and took a cold shower.

As he walked into the breakfast nook, the blood racing through his veins, Manny looked up from his paper. "Boy, did you snore! A saxophone couldn't of done better."

Freeda, who was nursing the baby, nodded approvingly. "That's a sign you're tired. You look like you could pack away a meal. You do, Paulie. You ought to see yourself—so gray and tired. It broke my heart."

The older boy, a soft, blue-eyed, little grub, nosed his uncle, and clamored to be put on his knee. Paul had to hold him, and Freeda saw a resemblance between uncle and nephew, and Manny slapped the table. "By God, if there ain't!"

Freeda cried, "But look, you're just having coffee. Eat this honeydew, have a piece of herring. I can make waffles for you or honeycakes. The whole year you go starving yourself for your medical school. It's your teeth, that's why you're not eating." The baby lost the nipple, and she helped him find it. "Manny, you take care of his teeth. Do you hear me?"

All morning Manny tried to work on Paul and had him in the chair, only to have something interfere: an emergency extraction, a patient with a previous

appointment, a last-minute job on an inlay.

Manny did his mechanical work in a closet off the hall. He worked on a small bench on which were scattered instruments and impressions of teeth for which inlays were to be made. Each impression was covered with wax into which needles were stuck. He picked up one of the impressions, covered it with cement, and removed the needles. Under a flame the wax melted and disappeared through the holes left by the needles. Then he trained a torch on the pieces of gold that he had dropped on the holes in the cement. The pieces shivered into glass, quickened into a bubble, which turned into a trembling little egg. Rapidly he transferred the cement with the liquid gold to a casting machine. The depressor of the casting machine drove the gold into the needle holes. Manny removed the cement and held the gold inlay in the palm of his hand.

Paul had never given his brother-in-law credit for any ability. He muttered, "Not so bad."

Manny said indifferently, "I'm getting me a mechanic to do all this dirty work soon." He lit a cigaret and strolled down the hall to the manicurist's to chat with the girls for a minute.

A pang of envy stabbed Paul. As he leaned over the bench fingering and examining this capital piece of work, he wondered when he would have a lab of his own, when he would have the instruments and mastery to feed the great hunger always hounding his heels.

The waiting room filled. Manny did not have enough time to eat a sandwich for lunch, and he did not put Paul into the chair until nightfall when he drilled hell out of him to make up for lost time. He asked, "Don't you feel any pain, you man of iron?"

Paul had felt it all right. "It'll take more than you to hurt me," he snapped.

"Pip, pip." Manny found a number of cavities, filled some of them, and sealed the molar with temporary filling material. "Listen to your Dutch uncle: next to his manhood a man's mouth is his prize possession. Take care of it, even if you don't use it much."

"Thanks," said Paul dryly.

Manny could not finish his work on him that night. He would have to stay another day. Paul had prepared himself for that and agreed.

Freeda's joy knew no bounds when she heard that he was not leaving until Sunday. "Some of the girls of the Ladies' Auxiliary are coming to play bridge tonight. They want to meet my handsome brother."

Dreading to be left alone with her, Paul promptly accepted an invitation to go riding with Manny after dinner. They promised Freeda they would be back for the bridge game. Manny drove into the next town to pick up fishing tackle at a sports goods store. On his way back, he stopped at a pharmacy on Main Street. Here they found Williams chewing the fat with a short, thin fellow with deepset eyes and a long nose which gave him a look of extraordinary keenness. It was Allen, the bacterio-chemist.

Paul's boredom vanished. He shook hands warmly with Allen. But the

other two men had their hooks in the scientist and he couldn't get a word in edgewise.

Williams left the store in charge of his clerk, and then the three of them drove over to a house on Long Island Sound where Dr. Meltzer, the veterinary, was playing poker with the town's brain trust. The trust consisted of the town's corporation lawyer, a civil engineer, an architect, a high school teacher, and the physician, Katz, who greeted his future competitor sourly.

Paul refused to buy chips; he sat to one side and watched Allen. He had taken a liking to this quick, lean man with the clean, hard jaw. Allen winked at him, hung his coat on his chair, loosened his tie, and flung his billfold on the table. He drank heartily of the dago red in the gallon jug and helped himself to the salami and rye bread stacked on the table. He roared at Meltzer's kibitzing and odd stories.

The veterinary had an assorted collection of "tails" about dogs. Relating the one about the prize chow owned by a local banker, he boasted that his Kaiser Schnitt had saved her life. He had also been the only vet in the country who had correctly diagnosed excessive salivation as dogging on the part of a German wolf brought from abroad by the president of an eastern railroad.

"I got my dogs trained," he cried, waving his hand at the rich furnishings of the room.

"They're better trained than an Irish truckman or a wop on relief," said the Katz the physician, a heavy man with a sour face.

"What's your opinion, Al?" boomed Williams. "Are dogs a better living than bugs?"

Allen swallowed his wine and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Depends on how you look at it, Billy."

"Come clean."

"It's out of my line."

"Was that case of radium poisoning outside your line, too?" asked Williams with a grin. "Where those women got their legs permanently crossed working in that watch factory, and their men sued on account of loss of services."

Allen blushed like a boy.

"Hey," cried Manny, "each for his own line is right. I was telling the kid here soon as I'm set I'm getting me a mechanic. Being a mechanic's no part of a dentist's line any more. It's a waste of time."

He turned for confirmation to Paul, who was looking over Allen's shoulder at his cards. Paul remembered the little gold egg, the casting machine, the inlay. He looked up and said, "I'd waste my time then."

"You're a kid," said Manny. "Because specialization is the trump card today. A fellow don't even have to know chemistry to be a dentist. Look at me. I was lousy in it. Finals come along in school, and I was scared green I'd flunk. It would have been all over with me but the shouting. But I wasn't the only one up the creek, and that's what saved me. We had a chemistry genius in our class. He was so poor half the time he wore rubbers to save his shoes. A flock of us sturgeon dentists got together, and we all chipped in a couple of bucks for him.

There was an epidemic of cramps that exam. Everybody had the crying need. He wrote the answers out and hid them under the toilet seat. There wasn't a single man that didn't pass with flying colors. There's science for you!"

Allen's laughter rang out merrily. The color hung in his lean face. "There's science for you," he repeated and banged on the table. "There's science!"

"So God was with me, Emanuel, and now I'm a dentist."

"God is with us," said Meltzer, "and now we're dogcatchers, engineers, brotfresser, and doctors—."

"On our behinds," said Katz, the physician, sourly.

Bored, Paul rose and left the smoke-filled room. He opened a door and found himself in the vet's office. The walls were lined with shelves. He picked up a book on general anatomy, dropped into a swivel chair, and began reading.

The chips clattered on the table. Above the guffaws could be heard Katz's drone, "Tin God."

"He don't smoke or drink. He won't give a girl a tumble. Freeda's worried about him; she's driving me crazy."

"Those kids think they'll make a big stink in the world. Look at me. Did I have a cinch getting my degree? I rung fares all night as a conductor. From the car barn I went to school. I don't give myself no airs. So I'm a doctor. Hurrah! He'll end up like the rest of us, your tin Jesus."

"You can't talk to the boy. He's always reading and cramming. It ain't natural."

"Sticking it out alone is a pernicious form of onanism," observed Meltzer learnedly.

The poker game broke up at dawn. On their way to the cars the men made a scene around the statue of a huge St. Bernard on the lawn. Williams squatted under its belly, and spouting pharmacist's Latin, grunted that he was Remus, Rumus, the old Rumuns. Meltzer related how the hard-shelled aristocrats along the shore had tried to get the statue removed from the restricted zone, but he had won out in court after he had convinced the judge that the dog had been erected for beauty, not use.

Manny brewed himself some coffee when he got in, but Paul went to bed. He could not get out of his mind the scene at the vet's. For the life of him he could not understand how a man of Allen's gifts could associate with such a bunch of shysters and ignoramuses. He fell asleep after a while, and then awoke with a sudden start. The sun was streaming through the windows. His head ached, and his eyes felt as if dirt were under the lids.

Paul took a cold shower, letting the water blast down until his skin turned blue and his teeth clenched. He slapped his face hard, and as he was towelling himself vigorously, there was a knock at the door. He got into his trousers.

Freeda stood before him, rumpled and red-faced. "I gave it to him. Why didn't he come back like he promised? The girls were awfully disappointed." Catching Paul's look of annoyance, she quieted down. "You didn't sleep well."

"I slept."

"I heard you groaning."

He got his shirt. "You must have been hearing things."

Dressed in brown corduroys and knee-high boots, Manny was already at his breakfast when Paul came in with Freeda. "Kid, I got to go fishing with a patient. He's a crank. I can't break my promise. I'll be back in a couple of hours. Read the Sunday paper while I'm gone like a good sport."

He was at the door before Paul could get out a word. Paul swallowed his anger and went up to his room and shut himself up with his book. He felt restless. He got into his coat and escaped from the house.

The tree-lined streets were full of churchgoers. Above the trees and the cottages big bells boomed. Gulls were wheeling over the harbor, picking up sticks and dropping them playfully, while off on the horizon a couple of yachts glided along, clay-white, as if they were fixed in a shooting gallery.

Paul was troubled by a mood that he could not trace, he could not understand. He wanted to take it easy, sit in the sun and chew the rag with somebody congenial. He walked to the fish wharf wondering where Allen lived.

Manny was on the wharf with his fishing gear. He looked disappointed. "Patient didn't show up. What a life! Say, Katz drove by. He asked what the tin God was doing?"

Paul curled his lips, and shoving his hands into his pockets, stood in the warm sun and stared over the peaceful water.

"Hey, how about coming along with me, Paulie? I need company. I don't like to fish alone. It's like talking to yourself." He saw Paul hesitate. "It'll do you good. We'll be back in time for me to finish your teeth."

Paul seized the second pair of oars. The exercise would sweat out of him this mood which had him at its mercy. He rowed strongly behind Manny who sent the round-bottomed boat shearing expertly towards a tiny island about a mile off shore. They anchored a stone's throw from the island.

Manny baited his hooks and dropped them over, while Paul lay back indolently in the boat. The first catch, a flounder, came up in a few seconds. "God is with me, Emanuel." The second fish was a peppered borgal which got loose. Paul tried to catch it, but it put up a great battle with its splintery fins, ripped his finger, and fell overboard. Manny was busy with a smelt which had swallowed the hook, and as he tried to get it out, the fish struggled, its anal hole closing and blinking like a pitiful small eye, and then the hook came out with the guts and brains.

Paul jerked his head away. He laved his burning face with water until his nausea passed. As he closed his eyes, his brain resumed its strange backfiring. Before him flashed a scene of his boyhood—his schoolmates hooking sunfish in the park lake with the bent pins stolen from the shop while the milliner's spindly son roosted in a tree as a lookout for the cops. He had cut his cords years ago without regret from every one of those boys. He gripped the gunnel of the boat and sat up. He must be sick to belch up the past that way.

"No, sir," said Manny thoughtfully, "I wouldn't want to be a fish. You can't drink anything but water. You can't lay up with a woman."

"Great calamity," muttered Paul.

Manny stared at him in stupefaction, and then slowly a grin spread over his face. "Alone is a pernicious form of onanism."

"You go to hell!"

"Can't you take a joke? What's wrong with a little horsing once in a while?"

"I'm storing the horse for the future," said Paul. "I'm packing it away on ice."

The air was becoming muggy and oppressive. The sky thickened. Manny kept on fishing, though his catch was filling the bottom of the boat. Lightning flashed overhead like a rod, and swiftly as from a reel, the rain came down. They bent at the oars, grunting and gasping, the downpour threatening to swamp them. As they got into the harbor, the clouds lifted. On the wharf sat the fishermen like tubs and pots steaming in the sun. Manny flung a couple of fish to some ragged kids.

For their dinner there was a thick steak, smothered in onions, with hillocks of potatoes, and Freeda between both of them, selling her cooking again.

In a bathrobe too small for him, having hung his suit to dry. Paul made a desperate effort to eat. He sank his teeth into the steak and lost the temporary filling. The tooth started aching.

Manny rushed through the meal. "Our football team's playing this afternoon. Williams's brother is halfback. I just got to see the first quarter, Paul, I'll be back soon."

Paul's jaw dropped.

"Take it easy, take it easy. I got nothing the rest of the day. Now I got to meet people. It's part of the day's work, and if I'm not around, there's all kinds of talk. Wait till you open your office, you'll see." He made for the door.

Freeda ran before him.

"You don't have to run interference for me." He slapped her across the rump. "I'll fix his mouth it'll look like a work of art. I'll be back soon. I'll drive him back to the city."

"Always, always my family. You took from Mama, you took from Paulie so he was left with nothing, selfish beast," she cried as the door banged.

She went to Paul. "Be patient. He'll be back soon. We'll have supper, and I'll see he drives you home. I wanted to talk to you all the time, a heart to heart talk." She stroked his shoulder. "What'll happen when you get sick? I want to help you. Why don't you talk? Are you afraid you'll owe me something? I took from you. You can take from me. You got to take from people and give."

"I don't want to go into that, Freeda!" He kept staring at his long hairy legs stretched out from the grotesquely small bathrobe, and slowly his anger petered out. In a couple of hours he would be out of here; no use losing his head like a kid.

"You're all alone, Paulie, making a worse orphan of yourself. It ain't human to be that way. Come, live here. Williams could give you a job at his lunch counter. You could commute to school. We got a nice temple here with young folks. Celia Salzman, her father owns the biggest store—."

This was too much for him. He pushed her hands away. "I came here to have my teeth fixed, Freeda, not my life!"

Tears filled her prominent eyes, so like his mother's.

He strode over to where his gray wrinkled suit was drying.

"Paulie, brother!"

As he put on his suit, she wrung her hands, turned this way and that, and dashed upstairs. Returning with the children, she sicked the little boys on him with their clogged noses and their packed behinds. With a moan she ran to the telephone. "I'll get him. I'll call up the cigar store across the field. It's near the harbor. They'll get him."

Paul picked up the older boy, who clung to his legs, and set him carefully on his bottom. He opened the door. As he fled down the street, a great roar broke out behind him. It came from the crowd at the football field into which Manny was wedged. And Allen? Try as he would, the image of the scientist, the spare, bright, and happy fellow, playing with that bunch dogged him to the station.

His tooth ached. What a weakling he was to have crawled back into the bosom of the family. Self-loathing made the sweat break out under his damp clothing. Suddenly aware of the book in his hand, he tightened his grip on it, but the world which he had admired for so long, the world in which law and order ruled like iron guards was as cold and as distant as a dead star.

He quickened his steps as if he were being chased. The image of Allen kept up with him. The railroad station was in sight. In a few hours he would be back in his own room; a physic, a night's rest, he would be in trim again. And then he saw himself coming into his room with its few sticks of furniture, its shabby rug, and its cold walls.

A crushing weight seemed to fall on him. He felt how utterly, dreadfully alone he was. Hard was the path he had hacked out for himself, and shaken to his very depths, he knew that the most difficult and trying days of his life were only just beginning.

HARRY LEVIN:

Literature as an Institution

1. The Contribution of Taine

"Literature is the expression of society, as speech is the expression of man." In this aphorism the Vicomte de Bonald summed up one of the bitter lessons that the French Revolution had taught the world. With the opening year of the nineteenth century, and the return of the Emigration, coincided a two-volume study by Madame de Staël: *De la Littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales.* This was not the first time, of course, that some relationship had been glimpsed. Renaissance humanism, fighting out the invidious quarrel between ancient and modern literatures, had concluded that each was the unique creation of its period, and had adumbrated a historical point of view. Romantic nationalism, seeking to undermine the prestige of the neo-classic school and to revive the native traditions of various countries, was now elaborating a series of geographical comparisons. It was left for Hippolyte Taine—in the vanguard of a third intellectual movement, scientific positivism —to formulate a sociological approach. To the historical and geographical factors, the occasional efforts of earlier critics to discuss literature in terms of "moment" and "race," he added a third conception, which completed and finally eclipsed them. "Milieu," as he conceived it, is the link between literary criticism and the social sciences. Thus Taine raised a host of new problems by settling an old one.

When Taine's history of English literature appeared, it smelled—to a contemporary reader, Amiel—like the exhalations from a laboratory. To that sensitive Swiss idealist, it conveyed a whiff of "the literature of the future in the American style," of "the death of poetry flayed and anatomized by science." This "intrusion of technology into literature," as Amiel was shrewd enough to observe, is a responsibility which Taine shares with Balzac and Stendhal. As Taine self-consciously remarked, "From the novel to criticism and from criticism to the novel, the distance at present is not very great." Taine's critical theory is grounded upon the practice of the realists, while their novels are nothing if not critical. His recognition of the social forces behind literature coincides with their resolution to embody those forces in their works. The first to acknowledge Stendhal as a master, he welcomed Flaubert as a colleague and lived to find Zola among his disciples. "When M. Taine studies Balzac," Zola acknowledged, "he does exactly what Balzac himself does when he studies Père Grandet." There is no better way to bridge the distance between criticism and the novel, or to scrutinize the presuppositions of modern literature, than by a brief reconsideration of Taine's critical method.

A tougher-minded reader than Amiel, Flaubert, noted in 1864 that—whatever the *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* left unsettled—it got rid of the un-

critical notion that books dropped like meteorites from the sky. The social basis of art might thereafter be overlooked, but it could hardly be disputed. Any lingering belief in poetic inspiration could hardly withstand the higher criticism that had disposed of spontaneous generation and was disposing of divine revelation. When Renan, proclaiming his disbelief in mysteries, depicted Jesus as the son of man and analyzed the origins of Christianity, then Taine could depict genius as the outgrowth of environment and analyze the origins of literature. On the whole, though critics have deplored the crudity of his analyses and scholars have challenged the accuracy of his facts, his working hypothesis has won acceptance. He has become the stock example of a rigorous determinist —especially for those who think determinism is a modern version of fatalism. Taine's determinism, however, is simply an intensive applicaton of the intellectual curiosity of his age. It is no philosopher's attempt to encroach upon the freedom of the artist's will; it is simply a historian's consciousness of what the past has already determined.

As for Taine's rigor, a more thoroughgoing historical materialist, George Plekhanov, has gone so far as to accuse him of arrant idealism. A recent artist-philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, describes Taine's empiricism as an unsuccessful effort to set up a realistic system of metaphysics. Actually his position is that of most realists, so outrageous to their early readers and so tame to later critics. His method explained too much to satisfy his contemporaries; it has not explained enough to satisfy ours. Confronted with the provocative statement, "Vice and virtue are products like vitriol and sugar," we are not shocked by the audacity that reduces moral issues to chemical formulæ; we are amused at the naiveté that undertakes to solve them both by a single equation. Taine's introduction to his history of English literature, which abounds in dogmas of this sort, is rather a manifesto than a methodology. If, reading on, we expect the history to practise what the introduction preaches, we are amiably disappointed. Each successive author is more freely individualized. How does Taine's all-determining scheme meet its severest test? With Shakespeare, he explains, after canvassing the material factors, "all comes from within—I mean from his soul and his genius; circumstances and externals have contributed but little to his development."

The loophole that enables Taine to avoid the strict consequences of his three determinants is a fourth—a loose system of psychology. Psychology takes over where sociology has given up, and the sociologist has shown surprisingly little interest in classes or institutions. He has viewed history as a parade of influential individuals, themselves the creatures of historical influences. To understand their achievements is "a problem in psychological mechanics." The psychologist must disclose their ruling passions; he must hit upon that magnificent obsession, that "master faculty" which conditions have created within the soul of every great man. Let us not be put off by the circular logic, the mechanical apparatus, and the scientific jargon: Taine, conscientious child of his temperament and time, was an ardent individualist. His theory of character owes quite as much to Balzac as his theory of environment owes to Stendhal. Had it been the other way around, had he combined Stendhal's

psychological insight with Balzac's sociological outlook, he might have been a better critic. His portrait of Balzac, for better or worse, is as monomaniacal as Balzac's portrait of Grandet.

Psychology is a knife, Dostoevsky warns us, which cuts two ways. We may look for a man in his books, or we may look to the man for the explanation of his books. Taine's is the more dangerous way: to deduce the qualities of a work from a pre-supposition about the author. The whole *Comédie humaine* follows from the consideration that Balzac was a business man, and Livy's history is what you might expect from a writer who was really an orator. This mode of critical characterization must perforce be limited to a few broad strokes, much too exaggerated and impressionistic to be compared with the detailed nuances of Sainte-Beuve's portraiture. Most of Taine's figures bear a strong family likeness. He is most adroit at bringing out the generic traits of English literature: the response to nature, the puritan strain, the fact—in short—that it was written by Englishmen. He himself, true to his theories, remains an intransigent Frenchman, and his history—to the point where he abandons Tennyson for Musset and recrosses the channel—remains a traveller's survey of a foreign culture. Why, in spite of all temptations to interpret other cultures, should Taine have been attracted to England?

Taine's critical faculties were conditioned not by science but by romanticism, and who was Taine to repudiate his own conditioning? Madame de Staël had been drawn to Germany, and Melchior de Vogué would soon be seeking the Russian soul, but English was for most Frenchmen the typically romantic literature. France had been the Bastille of classicism, while Britain had never been enslaved to the rules; untamed nature, in Saxon garb, resisted the shackles of Norman constraint. It took very little perception of the technique of English poetry for Taine to prefer blank verse to alexandrines. Form, as he construed it, was a body of artificial restrictions which inhibited free expression, and which English men of letters had somehow succeeded in doing without. One might almost say that they had developed a literature of pure content. "Not in Greece, nor in Italy, nor in Spain, nor in France," said Taine, "has an art been seen which tried so boldly to express the soul and the most intimate depths of the soul, the reality and the whole reality." What seemed to him so unprecedented is, on closer scrutiny, a complex tradition. Elizabethan drama is so much more baroque than the succinct tragedies of Racine that Taine missed its pattern altogether, and believed he was facing a chaos of first-hand and unconstrained realities. His impressions were those of Fielding's barber Partridge at the play, wholly taken in by theatrical make-believe, naively mistaking the actors for the characters they represent, quixotically confusing literature with life.

2. Sociological Criticism and Social Critics

Remembering Lamb's essay on the artificiality of Restoration comedy, we cannot share Taine's facile assumption that the English stage received and retained "the exact imprint of the century and the nation." We cannot accept this free translation of Hamlet's impulse to give "the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." We can admit that Taine was less of a critic than

a historian, but we cannot forgive him for being such an uncritical historian. His professed willingness to trade quantities of charters for the letters of Saint Paul or the memoirs of Cellini does not indicate a literary taste; it merely states a preference for human documents as against constitutional documents. In exploiting literature for purposes of historical documentation, Taine uncovered a new mine of priceless source material. But he never learned the difference between ore and craftsmanship. In his *Philosophie de l'art,* to be sure, he could no longer sidestep esthetic and technical discussion. He was forced to concede that art could be idealistic as well as realistic, and to place Greek sculpture at a farther remove from reality than Flemish painting. This concession allowed him to turn his back on the sculpture, and to reconstruct, with a freer hand than ever, the moment, the race, and the milieu of ancient Greece.

The serious objection to environmentalism is that it failed to distinguish, not between one personality and another, but between personality and art. It encouraged scholars to write literary histories which, as Ferdinand Brunetière pointed out, were nothing but chronological dictionaries of literary biography. It discouraged the realization, which Brunetière called the evolution of *genres,* that literary technique had a history of its own. It advanced a brilliant generalization, and established—as first-rate ideas will do in second-rate minds—a rule of thumb. The incidental and qualified extent to which books epitomize their epoch may vary from one example to the next. Taine's successors made no allowances for the permutations of form; rather they industrialized his process for extracting the contents of the books. The prevailing aim of literary historiography, under the sponsorship of Gustave Lanson in France and other professors elsewhere, has been a kind of illustrated supplement to history. Academic research has concentrated so heavily on the backgrounds of literature that the foreground has been almost obliterated.

Meanwhile Taine's influence has been felt in the wider areas of criticism, and here it has been subordinated to political ends. Taine himself was bitterly anti-political. He did not realize the importance of ideas until he had lost faith in his own: originally he had been a proponent of the doctrines of the *philosophes,* which he blamed in his later studies, *Les Origines de la France contemporaine,* for instigating the revolution of 1789. It was a Danish critic, closely associated with Ibsen, Nietzsche, and the controversies of the eighties, who broadened the range and narrowed the tendency of literary history. For politics, and for literature too, Georg Brandes had more feeling than Taine. A cosmopolitan liberal, deeply suspicious of the ascendancy of Prussia, he found a touchstone for the romanticists in their struggles or compromises with clerical reaction and the authority of the state. Byron and Heine were his urbane prophets, the Schlegels were renegades, and the revolution of 1848 was the anticlimax toward which his *Main Currents of Nineteenth Century Literature* moved. Where a book had been an end-product to Taine, to Brandes it was continuing force, and the critic's added function was to chart its repercussions.

Both aspects have been duly stressed in the critical interpretation of American writers—their reactions to their environment and their contributions to the liberal tradition. Our foremost literary historian, V. L. Parrington, extended

and modified Taine's formula to fit our problems, dramatizing New England puritanism from the standpoint of western populism, and pitting a heroic Jefferson against a sinister Hamilton. His title, *Main Currents in American Thought,* conveyed a fraternal salute to Brandes, and denoted an additional qualification. Parrington got around Taine's difficulty—the difficulty of using imaginative writers as historical sources—by drawing upon the moralists and the publicists. His chapters on Roger Williams and John Marshall are ample and rewarding; his accounts of Poe and Henry James are so trivial that they might better have been omitted. The latest period is inevitably the hardest, and his last volume is posthumous and fragmentary, but it seems to mark an increasing conflict between artistic and political standards. Granville Hicks, going over the same ground, was able to resolve that conflict by the simple device of discarding artistic standards.

Mr. Hicks, if he still adheres to his somewhat elusive conception of *The Great Tradition,* is a Marxist critic in the sense that Parrington was a Jeffersonian critic. The choice between them is largely a mattter of political standards. Jeffersonianism, naturally the most favorable climate in which to discuss American literature, has been taken in vain so often that it has begun to resist definition. Marxism, by redefining milieu in economic terms, has presented a more rigorous theory of historical causation than Taine's and a more ruthless canon of political allegiance than Brandes'. It has introduced criticism to a sociological system which is highly illuminating and a social doctrine which is highly controversial. It has tightened the relations between literature and life by oversimplifying them beyond recognition. In this respect Karl Marx, as he occasionally confessed, was no Marxist: he repeatedly cautioned his followers against expecting the arts to show a neat conformity with his views. Perhaps if he had written his projected study of Balzac, he would have bequeathed them a critical method. For lack of one, they took what was available. Marxist criticism superimposed its socialistic doctrine on the deterministic method, and judged according to Marx what it had interpreted according to Taine.

Extension and modification have added their corollary to Taine's method: the relations between literature and society are reciprocal. Literature is not only the effect of social causes; it is also the cause of social effects. The critic may investigate its causes, as Taine tried to do; or he may, like Brandes and others, be more interested in its effects. So long as he is correlating works of art with trends of history, his function is relatively clear. It becomes less clear as he encounters his contemporaries, and as the issues become more immediate. He is then concerned, no longer with a secure past, but with a problematic future. An insecure present may commit him to some special partisanship, Marxist or otherwise, and incline him to judge each new work by its possible effect—whether it will advance or hinder his party's program. Since art can be a weapon, among other things, it will be judged in the heat of the battle by its polemical possibilities. We need not deny the relevance or significance of such judgments; we need only recognize that they carry us beyond the limits of esthetic questions into the field of moral values. There are times when criticism cannot conveniently stop at the border. Whenever there are boundary disputes,

questions involving propaganda or regulation, we may be called upon to go afield. We shall be safe while we are aware that virtue and beauty are as intimately related as beauty and truth, and as eternally distinct.

3. The Role of Convention

It was as if Taine had discovered that the earth was round, without realizing that another continent lay between Europe and Asia. The distance was longer, the route more devious, than sociological criticism had anticipated. Not that the intervening territory was unexplored; but those who had explored it most thoroughly were isolationists. Those who were most familiar with the techniques and traditions of literature were least conscious of its social responsibilities. Most of them were writers themselves, lacking in critical method perhaps, yet possessing the very skills and insights that the methodologists lacked. A few were philosophers, striving—on the high plane of idealism—toward a historical synthesis of the arts. Their concept of expressive form, inherited by the esthetic of Croce from the literary history of Francesco de Sanctis, resembles the "organic principle" that Anglo-American criticism inherits from the theory of Coleridge, the preaching of Emerson, and the practice of Thoreau. By whichever name, it is too sensitive an instrument to be used effectively, except by acute critics on acknowledged masterpieces. With cruder material, in unskilled hands, its insistence on the uniqueness of each work of art and its acceptance of the artist at his own evaluation dissolve into esthetic impressionism and romantic hero-worship.

While this school is responsible for many admirable critiques, it has never produced that "new criticism" which the late J. E. Spingarn tried vainly to define. Conceiving art as the fullest expression of individuality, it has disregarded the more analytic approaches. Taine's school, though less discriminating, has been more influential, because it conceives art as a collective expression of society. The fallacy in this conception—we have already seen—is to equate art with society, to assume a one-to-one correspondence between a book and its subject-matter, to accept the literature of an age as a complete and exact replica of the age itself. One way or another, literature is bound to tell the truth; but it has told the whole truth very seldom, and nothing but the truth hardly ever; some things are bound to be left out, and others to be exaggerated in the telling. Sins of omission can usually be traced to some restriction in the artist's freedom of speech, his range of experience, or his control of his medium. Sins of commission are inherent in the nature of his materials. The literary historian must reckon with these changing degrees of restriction and exaggeration. Literary history, if it is to be accurate, must be always correcting its aim.

To mention one conspicuous case, the relations between the sexes have received a vast—possibly a disproportionate—amount of attention from writers. From their miscellaneous and contradictory testimony it would be rash to infer very much, without allowing for the artistic taboos of one period or the exhibitionism of another. An enterprising sociologist, by measuring the exposed portions of the human figure in various paintings, has arrived at a quantitative

historical index of comparative sensuality. What inference could not be drawn, by some future sciolist, from the preponderance of detective stories on the shelves of our circulating libraries? Those volumes testify, for us, to the colorless comfort of their readers' lives. We are aware, because we are not dependent on literary evidence, that ours is no unparalleled epoch of domestic crime—of utterly ineffectual police, of criminals who bear all the earmarks of innocence, and of detectives whose nonchalance is only equalled by their erudition. These, we are smugly aware, have not much more significance than the counters of a complicated game. Nevertheless, it is disturbing to imagine what literal-minded critics may deduce when the rules of the game have been forgotten. It suggests that we ourselves may be misreading other books through our ignorance of the lost conventions on which they hinge.

Convention may be described as a necessary difference between art and life. Some differences, strictly speaking, may be quite unnecessary: deliberate sallies of the imagination, unconscious effects of miscalculation or misunderstanding. But art must also differ from life for technical reasons: limitations of form, difficulties of expression. The artist, powerless to overcome these obstacles by himself, must have the assistance of his audience. They must agree to take certain formalities and assumptions for granted, to take the word for the deed or the shading for the shadow. The result of their unspoken agreement is a compromise between the possibilities of life and the exigencies of art. Goethe might have been speaking of convention when he said, *"In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister."* Limitation has often been a source of new forms, and difficulty—as the defenders of rhyme have argued, from Samuel Daniel to Paul Valéry—has prompted poets to their most felicitous expressions. Without some sort of conventionalization art could hardly exist. It exists by making virtues of necessities; after the necessities disappear, we forget the conventions. After perspective is invented, we misjudge the primitives; after scenery is set up, we challenge the unities. And Taine, forgetting that feminine roles were played by boys, is appalled at finding masculine traits in Elizabethan heroines.

His former classmate, Francisque Sarcey, who became—through forty years of playgoing—the most practical of critics, might have supplied the needed correction for Taine's theories. "It is inadequate to repeat that the theater is a representation of human life," Sarcey had learned. "It would be a more precise definition to say that dramatic art is the sum of conventions, universal or local, eternal or temporary, which help—when human life is represented on the stage—to give a public the illusion of truth." This illusion may be sustained in the novel more easily than on the stage; but it is still an illusion, as Maupassant frankly admitted. Although drama may be the most conventional of literary forms, and fiction the least, even fiction is not entirely free. Even Proust, the most unconventional of novelists, must resort to the convention of eavesdropping in order to sustain the needs of first-person narrative. We need not condone such melodramatic stratagems; we can observe that the modern novel has endeavored to get along without them; upon fuller consideration we may even conclude that the whole modern movement of realism, technically considered, is an endeavor to emancipate literature from the sway of conventions.

4. Toward an Institutional Method

This provisional conclusion would explain why literary historians, under the influence of realism, have slighted literary form. In their impatience to lay bare the so-called content of a work, they have missed a more revealing characteristic: the way the artist handles the appropriate conventions. Whether it is possible, or even desirable, to eliminate artifice from art—that is one of the largest questions that criticism must face. But realistic novelists who declare their intentions of transcribing life have an obvious advantage over realistic critics who expect every book to be a literal transcript. Stendhal, when he declares that " a novel is a mirror riding along a highway," is in a position to fulfil his picaresque intention. When Taine echoes this precept, defining the novel as "a kind of portable mirror which can be conveyed everywhere, and which is most convenient for reflecting all aspects of nature and life," he puts the mirror before the horse. He is then embarrassed to discover so few reflections of the *ancien régime* in French novels of the eighteenth century. His revulsion from neo-classical generalities and his preference for descriptive details carry him back across the channel, from Marmontel and Crébillon *fils* to Fielding and Smollett. Some mirrors, Taine finally discovered, are less reliable than others.

The metaphor of the mirror held up to nature, the idea that literature reflects life, was mentioned by Plato only to be rejected. By the time of Cicero it was already a commonplace of criticism. It was applied by the ancients to comedy, the original vehicle of realism; later it became a byword for artistic didacticism, for the medieval zeal to see vice exposed and virtue emulated. When Shakespeare invoked it, he had a definite purpose which those who quote him commonly ignore. Hamlet is not merely describing a play, he is exhorting the players. His advice is a critique of bad acting as well as an apology for the theater, a protest against unnatural conventions as well as a plea for realism. Like modern critics who derive their metaphors from photography, he implies a further comparison with more conventionalized modes of art—particularly with painting. To hold up a photograph or a mirror, as it were, is to compare the "abstract and brief chronicles of the time" with the distorted journeywork that "imitated humanity so abominably." Art should be a reflection of life, we are advised, not a distortion—as it has all too frequently been. Criticism, in assuming that art invariably reflects and forgetting that it frequently distorts, wafts us through the looking-glass into a sphere of its own, where everything is clear and cool, logical and literal, and more surrealistic than real.

In questioning the attempts of scholars to utilize Shakespeare as the mirror of his time, Professor Stoll has reminded them that their business is to separate historical fact from literary illusion, to distinguish the object from its reflected image. Literature, instead of reflecting life, refracts it. Our task, in any given case, is to determine the angle of refraction. Since the angle depends upon the density of the medium, it is always shifting, and the task is never easy. We are aided today, however, by a more flexible and accurate kind of critical apparatus

than Taine was able to employ. An acquaintance with artistic conventions, which can best be acquired through comparative studies in technique, should complement an awareness of social backgrounds. "Literature is complementary to life." This formula of Lanson's is broad enough to include the important proviso that there is room in the world of art for ideals and projects, fantasies and anxieties, which do not ordinarily find a habitation in the world of reality. But, in recognizing that literature adds something to life or that it subtracts something from life, we must not overlook the most important consideration of all—that literature is at all times an intrinsic part of life. It is, if we can work out the implications of Leslie Stephen's phrase, "a particular function of the whole social organism."

The organic character of this relationship has been most explicitly formulated by a statesman and historian, Prosper de Barante. Writing of the ideas behind the French revolution while they were still fresh in men's minds, his comprehension of their political interplay was broader than Taine's. "In the absence of regular institutions," wrote Barante, "literature became one." The truth, though it has long been obscured by a welter of personalities and technicalities, is that literature has always been an institution. Like other institutions, the church or the law, it cherishes a unique phase of human experience and controls a special body of precedents and devices; it tends to incorporate a self-perpetuating discipline, while responding to the main currents of each succeeding period; it is continually accessible to all the impulses of life at large, but it must translate them into its own terms and adapt them to its peculiar forms. Once we have grasped this fact, we begin to perceive how art may belong to society and yet be autonomous within its own limits, and are no longer puzzled by the apparent polarity of social and formal criticism. These, in the last analysis, are complementary frames of reference whereby we may discriminate the complexities of a work of art. In multiplying these discriminations between external impulses and internal peculiarities—in other words, between the effects of environment and convention—our ultimate justification is to understand the vital process to which they are both indispensable.

To consider the novel as an institution, then, imposes no dogma, exacts no sacrifice, and excludes none of the critical methods that have proved illuminating in the past. If it tends to subordinate the writer's personality to his achievement, it requires no further apology, for criticism has long been unduly subordinated to biography. The tendency of the romanticists to live their writings and write their lives, and the consequent success of their critics as biographers, did much to justify this subordination; but even Sainte-Beuve's "natural history of souls," though it unified and clarified an author's works by fitting them into the pattern of his career, was too ready to dismiss their purely artistic qualities as "rhetoric." More recently the doctrines of Freud, while imposing a topheavy vocabulary upon the discussion of art, have been used to corroborate and systematize the sporadic intuitions of artists; but the psychologists, like the sociologists, have been more interested in utilizing books for documentary purposes than in exploring their intrinsic nature. Meanwhile, on the popular level, the confusion between a novelist and his novels has been

consciously exploited. A series of novelized biographies, calling itself *Le Roman des grandes existences,* invites the common reader to proceed from "the prodigious life of Balzac" through "the mournful life of Baudelaire" to "the wise and merry life of Montaigne."

If fiction has seldom been discussed on a plane commensurate with its achievements, it is because we are too often sidetracked by personalities. If, with Henry James, we recognize the novelist's intention as a figure in a carpet, we must recognize that he is guided by his material, his training, his commission, by the size and shape of his loom, and by his imagination to the extent that it accepts and masters those elements. Psychology—illuminating as it has been—has treated literature too often as a record of personal idiosyncrasies, too seldom as the basis of a collective consciousness. Yet it is on that basis that the greatest writers have functioned. Their originality has been an ability to "seize on the public mind," in Bagehot's opinion; conventions have changed and styles have developed as lesser writers caught "the traditional rhythm of an age." The irreducible element of individual talent would seem to play the same role in the evolution of *genres* that natural selection plays in the origin of species. Amid the mutations of modern individualism, we may very conceivably have overstressed the private aspects of writing. One convenience of the institutional method is that it gives due credit to the never-ending collaboration between writer and public. It sees no reason to ignore what is relevant in the psychological prepossessions of the craftsman, and it knows that he is ultimately to be judged by the technical resources of his craftsmanship; but it attains its clearest and most comprehensive scope by centering on his craft—on his social status and his historical function as participant in a skilled group and a living tradition.

When Edgar Quinet announced a course at the Collège de France in *La Littérature et les institutions comparées de l'Europe méridionelle,* he was requested by Guizot's ministry to omit the word "institutions" and to limit himself to purely literary discussion. When he replied that this would be impossible, his course was suspended, and his further efforts went directly into those reform agitations which culminated in the democratic revolution of the following year, 1848. Thereby proceeding from sociological to social criticism, he demonstrated anew what French critics and novelists have understood particularly well—the dynamic interaction between ideas and events. In a time which has seen that demonstration repeated on so vast a scale, the institutional forces that impinge upon literature are self-evident. The responsibilities that literature owes to itself, and the special allegiance it exacts from us, should also become apparent when we conceive it as an institution in its own right. The misleading dichotomy between substance and form, which permits literary historians, like Parrington, to dismiss "belletristic philandering," and esthetic impressionists, like Mr. R. P. Blackmur, to dispose of "separable content," should disappear as soon as abstract categories are dropped and concrete relations are taken up. And the jurisdictional conflict between truth and beauty should dissolve when esthetics discovers the truth about beauty; when criticism becomes—as Bacon intended, and Renan and Sainte-Beuve remembered, and all too many other critics have forgotten—the science of art.

BERTOLT BRECHT:

Three Ballads

Translated by H. R. Hays

Concerning Poor B. B.

I, Bertolt Brecht, come from the dark forest.
My mother carried me to town while in her womb I lay
And still the coldness of the woods lingers
And shall remain in me until my dying day.

I am at home on pavements. From the beginning
Well provided with extreme unction—sacrament
Of newspapers. And tobacco. And likewise brandy.
Mistrustful, lazy, yet in the end content.

I make friends with people. And I wear
A derby on my head as others do.
I say they're strangely stinking animals.
And I say: no matter, I am, too.

Forenoons in my rocking chair I sit
Between a pair of women, days on end,
And I gaze upon them carelessly and say:
Here you have a man on whom you can't depend.

I gather some fellows around me toward evening:
We address each other as "gentlemen."
They put their feet up on my table
And say things will improve. And I don't ask when.

Toward morning the fir trees piss in the grey light
And their vermin, the birds, begin to cheep.
At this hour, in town, I empty my glass:
I knock out my pipe and unquietly I sleep.

A flimsy race, we have lived in houses
Said to be built indestructibly
(As we reared the tall buildings of Manhattan Island
And the thin antennae that span the Atlantic Sea).

There shall remain of these cities but the wind that blew through them!
The house maketh the feaster merry: we are taught.

We know that we are the forerunners
And after us will come—practically naught.

In the earthquake to come it is to be hoped
I shan't allow bitterness to quench my cigarette's glow,
I, Bertolt Brecht, astray in cement cities,
Brought from the woods in my mother long ago.

Song of the Inadequacy of Man's Higher Nature

A man lived by his head:
His head will not suffice.
Just take a look at your own head
It raises only lice.
For this world we live in
None of us are sly enough.
Never do we notice
All is lie and bluff.

Make yourself a plan,
One that dazzles you!
Now make yourself a second plan,
Neither one will do.
For this world we live in
None of us are bad enough.
Yet our higher nature's
Made of splendid stuff.

Chase after luck and joy
Yet never hope to find them
For all men chase and do not see
Happiness behind them.
For this world we live in
None of us have modesty enough.
Thus our higher nature
Is but pose and bluff.

Man is not good at all
So just hack off his head.
Perhaps he'll change his nature
After he is dead.
For this world we live in
None of us are good enough.
Therefore let each one calmly
Hack off the other's head.

Legend of the Dead Soldier

When the fifth springtime of war
No sign of peace brought forth
At last the soldier took French leave
And died a hero's death.

Because the war was not quite done
It made the Kaiser blue
To think the soldier lay there dead
Before the time came due.

Summer flowed across the graves
And the soldier he slept on.
And then one day there came a mil-
itary medical commissión.

The medical commission trailed out
To the little acre of God
And with sanctified spades they dug the fallen
Soldier out of the sod.

The doctor looked him over well
Or what was left to see.
The doctor found he was O K,
A shirking coward he.

They took the soldier along with them,
The night was blue and fine.
You could—without a helmet on—
Have seen the stars of home.

With fiery schnapps they tried to rouse
His rotted limbs to life.
Brothers and sisters they hung on his neck
And his half-naked wife.

And since the soldier stank of rot
A priest limped on before
Who waved an incense burner about
So he should stink no more.

In front the music with tzing-boom-boom
Played a jolly march
And the soldier, the way he was taught,
Swung his legs from the arse.

Arms linked in his, two whitewings walked

And held him tenderly
For he would have slipped down in the mud
And that must never be.

They painted colors on his shroud,
Red, white and black,
And carried the colors on before
So no one saw the muck.

A man in tails strode on ahead,
His chest was bulging, too,
For as a German citizen
He knew just what to do.

And marching then with tzing-boom-boom
Down the dark road they go
And the soldier reeled as in a storm
Like a pale flake of snow.

The cats and dogs began to howl,
The field rats squeaked at him.
They wouldn't think of being French
Because it was a sin.

And when they passed through villages
The women all were there.
The trees bowed low. The full moon shone
And all cried out: hurrah!

With tzing-boom-boom and fare-thee-well
With priest and dog and dame—
And in the middle like a drunken ape
The fallen soldier came.

And when they passed through villages
The crowd it left no room
To see the soldier, so many ran
With hurrah and tzing-boom-boom.

Around him so many danced and howled
That none could him espy.
You could only see him from above
Where stars looked down from the sky.

Not always do the stars remain:
There comes a dawn at length.
Yet the soldier as he was taught
Pursued his hero's death.

HOWARD NUTT:

The Good Apple

When we get where we're going
(Sleep, child, and bless your heart)
We'll set the wagon down and Ma
Will bake an apple tart.

No matter how far west we go,
By a good trail or the worst,
Old Johnny—Johnny Appleseed—
He will have been there first,

And left an orchard on that land
All west of where they say
The cowards never started
And the weaklings died on the way.

We'll have our own tall acres where
The days are wide apart.
When we get where we're going, child,
It will all be apple tart.

The Apple Man

In 1810, or thereabouts,
Across an Indiana May,
A quaint man in a queer dress made
His unmolested way.

And this was Johnny Appleseed,
A man who struggled, singlehand,
For half a century to make
An orchard of that land.

He moved among the scattered cabins,
Doctor and lawyer to these folk,
Into their lonesome seasons brought
The tonic of his talk,

Scattered his seeds, and disappeared
To make, possessed and penniless,
Another pilgrimage to some
Cross-mountain cider press . . .

To us who dicker and distrust,
Count and counter and counterfeit,
Such strange outlandish lack of lust
Would seem a want of wit.

But those he counseled and consoled,
Making his bed upon the bare
Floors of their homes and hearts—they knew,
These people were aware

His wants were all a wealth. Himself
An apple of a man, indeed,
He brought into that lonely land
More than the apple seed.

The Ample Apple

Hearing the ax, the shot, the shouts
Of men, and driven by some quirk
Of faith, a lustless wanderlust,
He knew that he must hurry with his work.

But not alone to plant a fruit
That men of hunger might consume,
He must establish that strange root—
The feeling of an orchard in full bloom:

An Ample Apple in the high
Hills of our heritage, a part
Of him who sowed the seeds that were
Within the pucker of his drawstring heart.

The Sour Apple

Johnny's fruit was good to eat,
A downright bellyful
That, being eaten, made men wish
To wish their brothers well.

And then came those who tried to graft
The apple of their creeds
Upon the talon-rooted trees
Fathered by Johnny's seeds.

Manure, of a moral sort,
They scattered at the root,
Hysterical hosannas
Sprayed on the young fruit.

But these have given us a food
That makes no belly full
And sets on edge the teeth that are
Not anchored in the skull.

JOSEPHINE MILES:

In Air

What's in the air is won, the air over,
The veriest pebble and blade, the air over,
Veriest peak and plane, air over
Hope and hope.

What's in every listener's head, said or not,
Air resting said in every listener's head,
Is hoped and won.

What's hoped is breathed and blown over every town
And so banked and reeled over every field
And so borne aware
In every grain of air.

Puffs in the nebulae and spins and spreads
In the starheads,
The hope and care won in our very air.

Audience

He sang to his dog who was sitting on the hearth
And sang the dog his heart
With a tremulo tremulo tremulo
And a bass baritone.

But the dog was not there to hear, he was running
Right in field, caught in sunlight
Called unfinite though he didn't know,
Along the line of sun and in the field
Racing, as he would.

Nevertheless at many hearths the listeners
Leant to the tremulo and gave heart
Back to that baritone, so he felt
Heard as he would.

Gypsy

The entire country is overrun with private property, the
    gypsy king said.
I don't know if this is true,
I believe in the gypsy kingship though.

The lost tribes of my own nation
Rove and rove.
In red and yellow rough and silent move.

I believe
The majesty pot mending, copper smith
On the hundred highways, nothing to do with.

And black eyes, black I never saw,
Searching out the pocket lines of cloth
The face lines and the furrows of belief.

It's a curious fact, Stephan, King, if you are made to doubt
Aegyptian vision on the Jersey shore,
Property's private as ever, ever.

Actor

The actor never turned, his arm lay hard
Upon the rail, head bent and shoulder bent
And bent the thousand eyes that with him wept,
And so he smiled, of his own fate to think:

That next he would uprise in motion fluent
Single and swift with some of violin
And by a smile not like to that he used
Turn all this fine dross to a shaky gold.

Decision

I heard they had not made up their minds,
It was necessary to have a decision in the bird alive A. M.
In the smoke burning, fast breaking, how we had to know!
But got nothing.

I heard there was going to be delay about the final word,
Something not coming through, getting toward noon.
Jim, hurry up, take in your palm like a plan
The moving impulses of your committeemen.

Name

He liked the name of Norwood. Not his.
The need of Norwood ran a vein in him.
All other consequence he knew for sure
Could follow this.

What's the commandment written down in clay
That scolds the name of Norwood in his mind?
And bids him answer what he's Christian called,
And holds the name away?

MORTON IRVING SEIDEN:

A Psychoanalytical Essay on William Butler Yeats

Although the poetry of William Butler Yeats at last receives the appreciation it justly deserves, its proper meanings—the meanings of the best poetry of our time—seem entirely to have escaped us. This has been due, I think, to the dichotomy which now exists between two views of his esthetic, neither of which, unfortunately, has captured the essential meaning of this esthetic. One, held by Edmund Wilson and others, has very largely represented Yeats as a symbolist in the tradition of such French writers as Verlaine, Baudelaire, and Mallarmé. The other view—as espoused by William York Tindall, for instance —treats Yeats almost entirely as a transcendentalist in the long line of European mystics from Jean Paul Richter through Carlyle, Tennyson, and Ruskin, to Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, and Christopher Isherwood. Mr. Wilson's thesis is stated in *Axel's Castle,* Professor Tindall's in his forthcoming history of contemporary British literature, a portion of which has been printed in Accent, Summer 1945.

There is, of course, a great deal of truth in each thesis. There *is* much in Yeats' poetry that is over-subtle, suggestive, allusive. In some of his early poems one can, without difficulty, find traces of conscious indirection. *Mosada* (1886), for all its puerilities and reflections of the younger Tennyson, is a story in which meaning and narrative are sufficiently circuitous for it to take its place alongside *Axel* and *The Blue Bird.* On the other hand, we must also recognize that in his chief images—moon and rose, serpent and tower, water and island—Yeats saw mystical reflections of a great supernatural world which both surrounds the universe and rests organically in it. Suggestion and transcendentalism, however, are only aspects of Yeats' muse. Whether they are the most important or the least important must remain simply a matter which private judgment alone can determine. In any case, they ought not to be so emphasized that either the critic or the scholar loses sight of the constant use Yeats made of his own dreams and the dream symbol as the chief sources for his lyric and narrative verse.

In his footnotes to the various poems, as well as in such prose works as *Ideas of Good and Evil* (1907), *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1918), and *Autobiography* (1938), the poet makes continuous allusions to his dreams and to the particular use he consciously made of the symbols or *pictures* that these night phantasies contained. "Cap and Bells" is a short poem that unfolds in an almost hypnotic rhythm the interesting story of a court jester that fell in love with a queen. Each night he would go beneath her window in order to serenade her and to speak to her of his love. The lady, however, rejected his advances; and the poor jester, overcome with despair, mystically bade his heart and soul leave his body and rise upward to her window-sill. Then, upon

removing his cap and bells, he sat at her doorstep and died. As it stands, the story, of course, has very little meaning. If one were to make out of this poem an example of French symbolism or even of late Victorian transcendentalism—it was written in 1895—one might very well get some meaning, some inkling of what the poet was trying to say. But much would still be lacking and a great many problems, I am sure, would be left unsolved. For example, why are the heart and soul dressed, respectively, in garments of red and blue? To argue that red and blue are two of the oldest mystical *color* symbols that we have, that Swedenborg, Boehme, and Blake were especially interested in the supernatural implications in these symbols, and that Yeats at the time of the composition of this poem was steeped in the writings of the seventeenth and eighteenth century occultists is but to beg the question. We still do not know the meaning of the colors as they are used in Yeats' poem. Fortunately, however, he has left us the answer, if we will but choose to make use of it. In a footnote to the poem, in the collected edition of his works (1933), Yeats has written the following:

> I dreamed this story exactly as I have written it. . . . [It] was more a vision than a dream, for it was beautiful and coherent, and gave me a sense of illumination that one gets from visions. . . . The poem has always meant a great deal to me. . . .

With this as our guide, the poet's own confession as to the ultimate source of his poem, we cannot, if we are to understand this or his other works, confine ourselves to the essential theses of either Mr. Wilson or Professor Tindall. Poem and symbol must first be regarded as precise reflections of the poet's subconscious mind, that magically elusive part of the entity we name human being, from which the best insights into life and human thought processes may be derived and, indeed, are derived by our most intuitively sensitive artists. As such, each at once becomes meaningful to us; and the whole appears to tell the story of a psychological conflict told as far back as Sophocles and as recently as Lawrence: the Oedipus complex.

"Cap and Bells" deals with the Oedipus complex, and, more specifically, the Oedipus complex made manifest in the artist's sense of psychic impotence. The *queen* symbol (as in all primitive cultures and in modern Christianity) represents motherhood; the jester or court-*poet* is, of course, Yeats himself; the colors red and blue, the organs heart and soul; and the cap and bells themselves are, I think, self-evident symbols for the male genitalia. The images thus explained should at once make clear the action and the atmosphere in which they have been placed by the poet. But this only takes care of one level, that unconscious or "exalting" level from which the poem first came to Yeats as a night phantasy. For the poem to have value as a work of art, it must also have a conscious level. And this too, given the inner meaning, now becomes apparent to us. On this level, the poem becomes—along with Swinburne's "Hertha" and Meredith's "Earth and Man"—one of the important nineteenth century poems to the fecundity of universal motherhood. To it as Hertha or Earth or Queen, we

sacrifice ourselves. From it we are born; from it we acquire our sense and power of divine procreation; and to it, like the totempole of Indian and Eskimo, we surrender our sexual selves when the time has come for us to cease in the reproductive process of humankind.

Thus to approach Yeats as a poet suffering from an Oedipus complex made intense by a painful sense of psychic impotence is not, by any means, to lessen his value as an artist. It is, rather, simply to explain away much of that obscurity left untouched by the *symboliste* and the transcendental critic. It is, furthermore, to place Yeats somewhat higher in the hierarchy of English writers, to see in him, as it were, the greater capacity for perceiving and for expressing the universal attributes and feelings of mankind.

One by one, it is possible for us to take up the poems that Yeats wrote during his long life; one by one it is possible to list the important *dream* symbols in his writings: rose, cross, moon, water, tower, staircase, needle of bone, serpent, urn, gyre, soul, spear, cup, door, tree, toad, harp, and so on; one by one it is possible to pick up each image that came from his pen and to place it on levels of interpretation reflecting on the one hand the unconscious life of society and on the other hand some important general truth about life and men. To do so, however, would be far beyond the scope of this paper. But inasmuch as it is important to understand just how the various theses that I have offered do apply to Yeats' poetry—I confessedly do not look upon my exegesis of "Cap and Bells" as complete—it may perhaps be of some real advantage to enter into a very careful analysis of one of his longer poems, *The Wanderings of Oisin* (1889). I choose the *Oisin* because it *is* one of his longest poems, because it is his first attempt at the long poem, and because I consider it a significant key to any proper understanding of Yeats either as a man or as a poet.

The Wanderings of Oisin may be looked upon simply as part of the romantic return to the literature of the Middle Ages and Celtic legend. Or we may place it, if we choose, in the long line of "primitive"[1] narratives that extend from the balladry of Herder, Goethe, and Bürger and the love poems of Keats through the Arthurian romances of Tennyson, Owen Meredith, and William Morris, to the chivalric and Dantesque motifs of Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Or we may look upon the *Oisin* as a work that holds an important place in the great Celtic Revival begun during the latter part of the 1880's in Ireland and brought to a climax in the following decade and the early years of the present century through the work of Standish O'Grady, George Russell (A.E.), Lady Gregory, and of course Yeats himself. One may approach the poem, as perhaps the *symboliste* critic would have us do, as having been written in the subtle, though somewhat decorative, tradition of the allusive, vague, suggestive literature of the decadent writers of contemporary France. It is, no doubt, possible also to see in the *Oisin*—through such symbols as the Swedenborgian "white horse" and such mystical images as bells, trees, towers, roses, and

[1] I use the word "primitive" here as Herder uses it in *Journal meiner Reise im Jahre 1769:* the unsophisticated, or naive, mood of non-classical literature, such as was written in early Greece and during the Middle Ages.

snow—an entire gallery of Kabbalistic and Rosicrucian devices. Perhaps, in a last analysis, the poem is *all* of these things.

But it is something else too. On the psychoanalytical level, it is, like "Cap and Bells," a study in Yeats' sense of psychotic loss due to an exaggerated Oedipus complex and imagined castration. On the conscious level, it is an expression of the artist's sense of impotence in the midst of our highly industrialized, and somewhat sterile, twentieth century.

The story of Oisin is very old in Celtic literature, going back further than the tales of Arthur and *The Mabinogian*.[2] And in the literary history of Ireland itself it seems to have been one of the most famous of all folk tales, from its first beginnings in the pre-Christian era to the most recent versions written during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The earliest of the latter was probably that of Michael Comyn—it appeared over a hundred and twenty-five years before Yeats' version. The latest, written at about the same time that Yeats was at work on his poem, were by the historian Standish O'Grady and the Gaelic translator Bryan O'Looney.

In the original narrative, Oisin is the symbol of an heroic period in Irish or Celtic civilization. He is, in the first place, the embodiment of Irish poetry, the Celtic Apollo, as it were. He is also the last sign of royal paganism before the ascetic advent of St. Patrick and Christianity. As both artist and man he, accordingly, holds an interesting and extremely important place in Gaelic history. The Emperor Julian, the last of the Romans to lament and to rebel against the Edict of Rome for what it had done to the old pagan deities, is Oisin's prototype on the continent. But Oisin is a far more exciting, far more romantic, figure than the Emperor. At the downfall of the old order, he did not remain behind for the defeatist purpose of throwing little thorns into the new creeds. Nor did he, like an Alfred de Vigny, lament in morbid solitude that he had been obliged to outlive the glorious traditions in which he had grown up. Instead, this old bard of the Celtic twilight departed from his world, fallen now into ruin by war and cultural revolution, and fled with Princess Niamh, mistress of Fairyland or Tirnanog,[3] into the Cyrenaic land of pagan make-believe.

Tradition varies not only as to the itinerary of the wanderings in Tirnanog, but also, I have been informed by Professor John V. Kelleher of Harvard University, as to who actually did the wandering. Nor, as Professor Kelleher also points out, has either tradition or story ever settled down to one form. According to most of the legends, however, and, more specifically, according to the versions that Yeats had at his disposal, the traveller is Oisin. But, after this, points of agreement quickly vanish even here. According to some legends, Oisin remained in Tirnanog for about three hundred years; others vouch for only about one hundred. In a few of the narratives that have come down to us, only one magic island is mentioned; and, on the other hand, several, such as

[2] It dates back to the second century.

[3] I have used Yeats' spellings throughout. These do not always correspond to the original Gaelic.

that preserved for us in Standish O'Grady's *Colloquy,* speak of four islands. Yeats *seems* to be the only poet to describe three islands. Also, the names that he assigns to these islands appear to have originated with him. Almost all the legends, however, do agree in the outcome of the story. At the end of the sojourn Oisin returns to Ireland, finds St. Patrick and Christianity in place of the old druids and pagan deities, meets the aged Saint at the end of a short period of further wandering, and refuses—at least he does so in Yeats' version—to accept the new asceticism.

So much, then, for the story of Oisin and its place in literary history. As a story in the history of Celtic legend or as an illustration of one kind of art technique, Yeats' poem is interesting; one may even say that it is important. It is not, however, a *great* poem—great as one is able to describe several of the tales in Lady Guest's rendering of *The Mabinogian.* The narrative is loose, the treatment over-sentimental and decorative, and the metrics rather amateurish.[4] Yet, I repeat, the poem is interesting, and it is important. It is these things for the light it sheds on Yeats' mind and on his creative process.

More, perhaps, than any poem that Yeats was ever to write, this poem, written when he was only twenty-four years old, is a study in self-revelation. Poor as art, it is a superb example of romantic introspection, of those disguised spiritual autobiographies which have become so popular with us as a result of the Romantic Movement. It, too, takes its place with Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1744), Foscolo's *Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (1798), Chateaubriand's *René* (1805), Wordworth's *Prelude* (1805; 1850), Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833), Browning's *Pauline* (1833), and the innumerable other examples of this genre that were written throughout the nineteenth century. It is only as such a spiritual autobiography, I believe, that Yeats' poem may justifiably hold our attention and merit our study.

In his *Autobiography* Yeats devotes several paragraphs to a discussion of the mental and emotional origins of the composition. For the most part, he is, in this confession, a little naive, a little vague. There is, however, one sentence the meaning and sincerity of which we cannot doubt. It is in this remarkable sentence that we have the complete secret to all the dream literature that Yeats was to write during his life, and, more specifically, to the undercurrents of meaning in the *Oisin.* Here not the poet but the man speaks to us: he himself confides that poem and narrative are simply a disguise for other and more important truths, only a superstructure for the personal symbols to which he alone has the key. Like so much literature of the Romantic Movement, Yeats' poem is but another example of an esthetic mould universalized out of an individual soul crisis. In this connection, it may perhaps be best to allow the poet to speak for himself:

> Under the disguise of symbolism I have said several things to which I alone have the key; the romance is for my readers: they must not know that there is a symbol anywhere.

[4] Yeats later rewrote the poem. My analysis is based on the first edition.

As a basis for his narrative Yeats used a Gaelic poem on the Oisin theme written by the eighteenth-century Irish poet Michael Comyn, and republished, along with a translation, in 1853 by the Ossianic League of Ireland. It was, of course, the translation, and not the original text that Yeats used. As Professor Kelleher informs me, Yeats was unable to read Gaelic and at this time could not even pronounce the language. The Comyn poem, which Yeats follows rather closely,[5] is a mixture of elements from several old tales, chiefly *The Colloquy of the Ancients* (circa 1200 A.D.), *The Adventures of Conna the Comely,* and *The Adventures of Art Son of Conn.*[6] As a work of art, however, it is not very good, and one must conclude that Yeats fell back on it only because, as he himself tells us in the *Autobiography,* the particular symbols of which Comyn makes use in his poem had made a strong esthetic, as well as *emotional,* appeal to him. Yeats does, of course, make several revisions in his source. One of these is the all-important use of three instead of the conventional one or four islands. The others include the employment of certain personal symbols which it is now our task to interpret and to fit into the total picture of his creative and his psychological being.

Yeats begins his poem at what may properly be called the conclusion of the action: Oisin has just returned from Tirnanog and has met with the very pious St. Patrick, whom he upbraids for the defeat of the old gods and the old heroes. The worthy Saint, however, with good Christian solicitude, tries to calm the unnerved hero and asks him to describe his adventures in fairyland. At first Oisin pretends unwillingness to revive painful memories of a lonely past. But, at heart, he is a romantic, and the opportunity for spiritual autobiography is too tempting to be missed.

It all happened a little over three hundred years ago. Ireland had been invaded by monsters from the North and at that sad time all the tribe of Finn Mac Comhal, with the exception of Finn himself, his son Oisin, and a few scattered warriors, had been killed at the famous Battle of Gabhra. Broken in numbers and in spirit, the Fenians brooded or roamed desultorily about the countryside. They did some hunting, some fishing; but mostly they dreamed of the days that had passed, of the old heroes at whose death a great age had faded. Then, one day, the very beautiful Princess Niamh came riding forth from Tirnanog on a splendid white horse. Seeing the remnants of a once happy people roaming sadly about the shore, she approached and beckoned to them. Their wretched condition moves her; and she offers, by way of divine compensation, to take Oisin with her into Tirnanog. The young poet is, of course, delighted by this prospect of immortal existence; and, in spite of the fact that Finn urges him not to accept—

> Caolite, Conan, and Finn came near,
> And wept, and raised their lamenting hands,
> And bid me stay, with many a tear. . . .

[5] Although I had come to this conclusion before having read his article, I feel that Mr. Russell Alspach has removed all possibility of doubt as to the source. See his "Some Sources of Yeats' *The Wanderings of Oisin,*" *PMLA,* LVIII, 859-866 (September, 1943).

[6] Again I am indebted to Professor Kelleher.

—he, nevertheless, mounts Niamh's white horse and rides with her across the oily seas to the Island of the Young.

Employing the psychoanalytical approach to one level of interpretation of Yeats' poetry, and explaining Finn and Ireland as father and fatherland symbols, Niamh and Tirnanog as mother and motherland symbols, it becomes possible for us to explain the adventures that follow in terms of five distinct stages of psychic conflict: the trip over the sea, the visit to the Island of the Young, the visit to the Island of Victories, the visit to the Island of Forgetfulness, and the return to Ireland. These become, in turn, the psychic regression to maternal protection, the psychic regression to youth, the psychic regression to adolescence, the psychic regression to pre-birth, and the psychic experience of *re-birth*. Let us examine each of these psychic states as they are unfolded in the disguised and symbolic language of the poem.

First, the abandonment of the father and the home of the father for the retreat to the protection of the mother and the home of the mother. Journeying across the sea, which incidentally is one of Yeats' favorite symbols and is here described by the telling adjective "oily," several kaleidoscopic views flit magically before him. These include a hornless deer pursued by a dog which is white save for one red ear, a maiden fleeing with a golden apple from a youth who is pursuing her, and phantoms as white as snow. The ecstatic and orgasmic implications of the last symbol are, I think, self-evident. It derives its full importance by being placed at the end of the catalogue of imageries as the summation of all significance to be found in each of the preceding ones. In other words, the deer-dog symbol and the virgin-youth symbol are parallel to each other, and derive their meanings of fulfilled pleasure in terms of the white phantoms that follow them. The meanings of these first symbols, however, are a little more difficult to determine. It, nevertheless, does seem that in the dog that is white save for one red ear and the running youth we must find the prototype of Oisin himself; and in the hornless deer and the virgin of the apples we must find the prototypes of Princess Niamh. The waters of the sea, which on one level symbolize the great womb of Hertha or Earth-Mother, on another must be regarded as the fruitful mirror of all existence. In it and through its dim shadows and mysterious phantoms, Oisin sees objectified decorative pictures of his own unconscious longings. These longings are, as I shall demonstrate, entirely of an Oedipus nature. And so, the three sets of symbols, running along-side of the actual journey into never-never land, tell in part the disguised, but painful, story of a poet's longings to commit the sin of incest.

We noticed earlier that the one peculiarity of Yeats' Oedipus complex was its complication by the sense of psychic impotence from which the poet suffered. In treating the Oedipus and castration complexes, we must keep in mind the relative importance of each condition. Up to the present I have dealt primarily with the first. By all odds, however, it is the second—the sense of castration, of impotence, of helplessness—that serves Yeats as the chief theme of this poem. Tirnanog is a retreat from the cruelties of the world through the divine assistance of motherhood. It is also the source of new sexuality, or, on the

conscious level, of renewed vigor, life-strength, and *raison d'être*.

An opportunity for such a renewal of existence may throw a man, psychically, far back into his life. A man who has suffered a loss of his powers will thus return to his youth; or he may go further back in the process of spiritual and physical regression to the period of adolescence; or he may even go back to the very well-springs of life, to the gestation period in the moments we name "pre-birth." Each of the three islands visited by Oisin during his sojourn in Tirnanog represents one of these three stages. The Island of the Young is the island of youth, the Island of Victories is the island of adolescence or puberty, and the Island of Forgetfulness is the island of sleep and foetal rest.

The first island visited by Oisin is the Island of the Young. The several adventures which befall him at this point in the story are told in an episodic manner, and this consequently weakens the narrative to a very great extent. The peculiar emphasis, however, that such dislocated story-telling gives to the symbols before the poet and reader is of immeasurable value. First Oisin sees very tall trees which, of course, terrify him. Next he gazes with wonder at "the fish eating stoats." Somewhat later the children of the island gather about him and laugh at his strange costume. Then Princess Niamh tries to comfort him by kissing the hem of the garment, at which moment he suddenly sees "a million white dewdrops drop around some new crimson flower" and picks up a harp on which, like the hero in another of Yeats' poems, "The Madness of King Goll," he begins to play soft, melancholy music. The next adventure occurs when he and the other children go to visit the King of the island that they may pay him their homage by placing their "hot lips" on his "long scepter." Finally, he sees a broken spear float towards him in a nearby stream. This awakens in him memories of Finn and home; and he eagerly gets permission from Niamh to set out for Ireland. He has been in Tirnanog, up to this point in the narrative, for about one hundred years.

The reader, having already been given the key to Yeats' state of mind during the moments of poetic composition, should have no difficulty in translating these symbols into a straightforward catalogue of emotional and intellectual states on two levels of human consciousness. On the conscious level, each symbol suggests either the social helplessness of the poet or his attempts at revivification. On the unconscious level, each symbol describes either the castration complex or the attempt to overcome it. The sense of castration is made manifest in Oisin's fear of the trees or phallic organs of the other children of the island; in the ridicule to which the children expose him because of what Freud has called the child's dream of his "laugh provoking garment." (Freud traces the dream of the odd costume to dreams of sexual exhibitionism, and he uses the story of the Emperor's new clothing as his literary example.) The sense of castration, finally, is made manifest in Oisin's morbid preoccupation with "some dead warrior's broken lance." On the other hand, the attempts to *regain* the lost individuality or surrendered sexuality are made manifest, I believe, in the kissing of the garment by the Princess, from whom, after all, as the mother symbol, individuality as well as life and sexual expression ultimately comes, in

the onanistic implications (as suggested by Freud) of the playing on the harp, and in the conjured vision of the orgasm: of "the million white dewdrops [which] drop around some new crimson flower." The remaining symbol of this section of the poem, the one which involves supplication before the King, presents additional difficulty and must, therefore, be treated separately.

In each island that Oisin visits he runs into some physical conflict with a man considerably older than he. It is not easy to characterize these phantom-like persons; but they all do have this one thing in common with each other: they struggle with Oisin and succeed in overcoming him, in bending him to their will. Viewing the poem as we have been, it should be evident, at once, that these three men, taken with Finn Mac Comhal, whose dwelling place is Ireland, represent fatherhood, that fatherhood which even in the child's return to maternal protection or foetal sleep still so possesses the maternal womb that even in psychotic regression sexual victory is impossible. This interpretation is, I believe, the only possible one, one which, moreover, incidentally delivers into our hands the undisguised reasons for the poet's castration complex. John Butler Yeats, the father, had obviously presented himself as a serious threat to Willie during the first stages of the growing up process. This threat was made first to his individuality and afterwards, by transference, to his sexuality, the two being, as I have already pointed out, pretty much the same thing. And the result became two-fold: as a consequence of the father's real or imagined threats, the boy acquired a sense of his own sexual or *personal* inadequacy; what sexuality seemed to remain uninjured after these threats had been felt, was then returned psychically to his mother, that she might protect it against his father. The fact that this is the truth that underlies not only the *Oisin* poem but also Yeats' actual life must become apparent to even the most cursory reader of his *Autobiography*. All the poet's devotion to the memory of his father does not for one moment conceal from the discerning reader the secret resentment of John Butler Yeats' attempts to devour little Willie's personality. The story is a pathetic one.[7] Yet there is a satisfying irony in our awareness that out of such misery there did ultimately come the inspired artist.

It takes about two hundred years for Oisin to return to Ireland. During this time, moving as it were in uteral unrest, he travels, together with Niamh and the white horse, over the oily seas of Tirnanog, fluctuating in various psychological and sexual states until he shall be reborn. (By the word "reborn," I mean merely to signify the return to the *father*-land or Ireland. Although this Tithonian sojourn in immortality sends Oisin back to his father's house as a young man, in spite of the fact that three hundred years have elapsed, his first physical contact with the earth of Ireland makes him old and decrepit.)

The second island at which Oisin and the Princess stop is the Island of Victories. The epithet for the island is as paradoxical as the two or three adventures which take place there: Oisin wins no victory but suffers only humiliating defeat. The narrative remains as episodic as previously and becomes, through

[7] I am partially indebted to Naomi M. Letsky, *John Butler Yeats*, New York, Columbia University Master's Thesis, 1942. (Unpublished)

the poet's constant dwelling on the same obvious symbols, somewhat monotonous. There is the strange man who mysteriously again puts in his ogre-like appearance, with whom the poet fights, and by whom he is once more subdued. Other symbols include the unfortunate virgin whom Oisin rescues from the knight of the island; the strange castle in which he meets the knight, a grotesque structure almost over-burdened with its wealth of sexual symbols: tall and small towers, doors, little openings, long alley-ways and foyers, green slime, and so on. The woman who is rescued is the prototype of Niamh—she, too, is dressed in a white garment—and, consequently, a symbol of motherhood. The ogre from whom she is rescued or *stolen* is but one more representation of ominous fatherhood. The castle is the maternal womb. The fight that takes place inside of it is simply the physical or symbolical objectification of that prevously described psychical sexual conflict which had existed between the child Yeats and his father. The fight lasts for about one hundred years, during which time Oisin succeeds merely in wounding the ogre's arms and in drawing forth oozing slime. He then sets out for the Island of Forgetfulness.

Of the three islands, this last is by far the most interesting. Whatever our *symboliste* or transcendental critic may wish to say by way of refutation of the preceding analyses, here at least, with all the Freudian paraphernalia, *is* the complete regression to the female womb. All over the island there are to be found "the naked gleaming bodies." Up in a nearby tree Oisin sees "the soft shining bells," which, incidentally, he is prevented from *touching* by the male guardian of the island. And in one last desperate move to recover his lost phallus, he sinks into a deep slumber in which his greatest achievement is the sweet imagining of a woman holding "a needle of bone."

Another hundred years pass. And at their end the poet hears the ringing bells. What these bells are and what their ringing means is difficult to say. If they are the same "soft shining bells" that he had found when he first visited the island, then, in all likelihood, they stand for the maternal breasts which have now become fruitful in preparation for Oisin's *re*-birth. On the conscious or intellectual level, they make one think of Chaucer's *The Boke of the Duchesse:* in the latter work they signify the time or waking element, and serve merely to call the dreamer back to the real world.

With the return of Oisin to Ireland we need not concern ourselves; it is told in a cursory manner by Yeats; I have already referred to the decrepitude which he suffers upon touching the earth of his *father*-land; and, aside from an unimportant adventure with a group of weary travelers and the famous encounter with St. Patrick already alluded to, nothing of any importance is introduced into the story at this part of the poem. We are not told what happens to Princess Niamh.

The four stages of Oedipus development—three on the waters of the womb and one in the land of birth—with which the poem deals may be summarized as follows: 1.) *The Island of the Young:* youth, complete sexual impotence; escape into close association with motherhood and into attempts at onanism; passive subjection to the father; 2.) *The Island of Victories:* adolescence; nor-

mal sexual awakening and immediate struggle with and defeat by the father; ultimate surrender of the phallus to motherhood for protection; 3.) *The Island of Forgetfulness:* foetal stage; denial of all sexuality as well as rationalized recovery of the lost phallus, preparation for *re*-birth; and 4.) *Ireland:* birth or *re*-birth, infancy, contact with the father; complete psychic emasculation made manifest in physical decrepitude.

I have called Yeats' *The Wanderings of Oisin* a poor poem but a vital esthetic study in spiritual autobiography, an important attempt on the part of a great poet to draw up general principles of human suffering in contemporary society on the basis of his own suffering, and then to cast these into an art form. How much I have or have not been able to lead the reader to an understanding and appreciation of these principles and this art form I shall allow him to decide. To be sure, a parallel biographical study of Yeats' life, based on the actual or overt details of that life would have made the essay, where it is confessedly not so, more credible. And yet, will not the interested reader turn now to a more careful study of Yeats' *Autobiography* as well as his other biographical writings, and will he not find therein, naked before his very eyes, the historical data which we have thus far found only in symbol and esthetic disguise? I believe that this is inevitable, and that in so doing he, too, will begin to look upon the *Oisin* not only as a wonderful work in romantic self-revelation but also as the perfect handbook to a fuller understanding and appreciation of his other writings.

Yeats' preoccupation with symbols and allegorical language did not merely extend from dream phantasy to the creative process. The images by which he disguised his deepest thoughts and feelings were troublesome to him, even after their tension had been softened by poetic expression. This fact, I believe, is extremely important and must account for the almost pathological interest he showed in Oriental mysticism, Kabbalism, Theosophy, and Rosicrucianism. Through these outlandish metaphysical systems, Yeats was able to take his most common symbols, *e. g.,* the rose and the moon, and give them perverted supernatural significance.

The first attempt that Yeats made to superimpose on his unconscious symbolism a mystical significance is his four year critical study of the prose and poetry of William Blake, *undertaken at about the same time that he completed the Oisin* (1889-1893). Most important in this study is the position that he has assigned to the Blakean Four Zoas. Nowhere else in his writings does the role assigned to the *Oisin* and the previously described rationalizing tendency become so apparent to the reader of his works.

These Four Zoas are four poles in the spiritual and physical life of man. They have their respective epithets—Tharamos, Luvah, Translucency, and Opacity—and their respective myths. What is interesting to the lover of Yeats, however, is the striking fact that each of these Four Zoas, as the poet has handled them, is merely a supernatural glorification of the four islands in the recently completed poem *The Wanderings of Oisin.* The Zoa of Translucency is called the Zoa of the womb and of complete spirituality. It corresponds to

the Island of the Young and the latter's designated spiritual innocence of childhood. Tharamos is the Zoa of the serpent or, to quote Yeats, of "the male organ of generation." It exists, he tells us, on the spiritual plane of instinct and of "water . . . the great fructifier." On the physical plane it is the Zoa at which both fathers and sons struggle for possession of the maternal womb. In it we must see the Island of Victories. Luvah, the Zoa of air and snakes, and the Zoa at which grown sons fight to suckle at their mothers' breasts, corresponds to the Island of Forgetfulness. Finally, the Zoa of Opacity, the Zoa of material existence and physical destruction, corresponds to Ireland, the island of birth and of bodily decrepitude.

A Vision, undertaken about thirty five years later, is another attempt on the part of the poet to place his disguised and symbolical language into a supernatural, pseudo-philosophical system.[8] This treatise is a vague, somewhat obscure study of the four principal phases of the Moon; the first, eighth, fifteenth, and twenty-second. The various phases, however, are diagrammed and described in the early parts of the book in a manner sufficiently lucid to enable us to understand most of what Yeats is trying to say. On the basis of the diagram and the introductory remarks, we learn that each of the four major phases corresponds to one of the islands in the *Oisin* and one of the Four Zoas outlined in the text on Blake. For the purposes of brevity and what meanings can be derived from the complex workings of a poet's *unconscious* mind, I present these relationships in outline form: 1.) The Island of the Young—the Zoa of Translucency—the Fifteenth Phase of the Moon: I make this triangle of figures because the Moon at this phase is not only represented in the diagram by the Rose, Yeats' private symbol for Motherhood,[9] but also described in the text as the Phase of Bodilessness or Spirituality. 2.) Ireland—the Zoa of Opacity —the First Phase of the Moon: The relationship here should be apparent. The phase is represented in the diagram by an apple, the symbol for destruction in the Garden of Eden. In the text Yeats speaks of it as the Phase of the Body and Annihilation. 3.) The Island of Victories—the Zoa of Tharamos—the Twenty-second Phase of the Moon: The twenty-second phase is drawn alongside of a spear. This should remind the reader of the spear in the Island of Victories and the serpent of Tharamos. The analogies in the sex rivalries are, I think, self-evident. 4.) The Island of Forgetfulness—the Zoa of Luvah—the Eighth Phase of the Moon: In the diagram of his Great Wheel of the various phases of the Moon, the eighth phase is identified with the womb or sleep symbol: a small basin or cup.

There is yet one other direct one-to-one correspondence between the basic theses of these three works. In each, we find that the chief interaction between

[8] In *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1918) Yeats outlines yet another system, that of the mask, and the least convincing (because it is the most confusing) of all his strange doctrines. Space does not allow an analysis of this new concept; but I do want to call to the reader's attention the important fact that this doctrine that men have two selves, which appears to me to be clearly schizophrenic and which (by sheer psychological jugglery) he fastens on to the Great Wheel of *A Vision* must also be approached in the manner adopted here for the *Oisin* and the Four Zoas.

[9] In several of his last poems Yeats calls the Moon "mother Moon."

the various symbols is carried on through the fluctuating or undulating movements of the main bodies. Oisin *wanders* over the seas of Tirnanog. Life *oscillates* between the poles of the Four Zoas. Humanity *grows* in spiral fashion around the twenty-eight phases of the Moon. The connection between this physical and spiritual mobility and the birth-life-death-rebirth cycles of animal growth and development is quite apparent from the very start, once the birth processes of the *Oisin* are understood. In the poet's universalizing of his own desire to regress to the maternal womb and to be reborn with greater potency and physical, as well as spiritual, fortitude, we see the longings of humanity to carry on the life-death-resurrection patterns of Hertha and the *four* seasons, of Christ and all the nature gods of the ancient world.

A Vision, thus, is not merely a cyclical representation of life and death for the animal kingdom. Yeats transforms his Great Wheel of the twenty-eight phases into a huge spinning gyre of human history, in which there is continuous change, the only constant being the great men or heroes whom he assigns to each of the several phases around the one phase of greatest spirituality, number fifteen. This doctrine is of tremendous importance in its relation to Yeats' own thought—the reader will recall that the only constants in the *Oisin* and the Four Zoas are the father or phallic symbols—and also in terms of the history of modern world thought. Human history has been almost invariably interpreted by major historians of the past two hundred years in terms of that one constant to whom Carlyle gave the name "hero," and out of whose divine nature the thinkers of contemporary Italy and Germany have falsely derived principles to justify dictatorship and war. From this point of view, it is not difficult to understand why the author of *The Wanderings of Oisin* and *A Vision* became, in the last years of his life, a *devoté* to the cause of Irish fascism. And yet let us not misunderstand Yeats' social point of view. The recent charges made against him as a reactionary are ill-founded. His interest in fascism was not serious, not even practicable: the most that we can say is that he loved the heroes of old Ireland and that strong leadership anywhere easily seduced him into dreamy admiration. A poet with a world view such as Yeats had, a poet whose mind thought in terms of the great cycles of human history, a poet who above all else expressed in the symbols and the language of his poems the universal longings of mankind and the particular problems of twentieth-century civilization is not, I am sure, one who could love anything but truth and beauty and the spirit of a free humanity.

WALLACE STEVENS:

Men Made Out of Words

What should we be without the sexual myth,
The human reverie or poem of death?

Castratos of moon-mash . . . Life consists
Of propositions about life. The human

Revery is a solitude in which
We compose these propositions, torn by dreams,

By the terrible incantations of defeats
And by the fear that defeats and dreams are one.

The whole race is a poet that writes down
The eccentric propositions of its fate.

JOHN MALCOLM BRINNIN:

Marianne Moore's

not an attitude
but a climate—
    native riviera
    where light, pale but successful, spots
        a lank destroyer stopped in a gorgeous calm,
        or a shark-like sloop.

Nothing predicted
her, unless the
    sea did, tossing, like a
    diamond in Kansas, a mil-
        limeter's labyrinth of coral on the
        tides of Rockaway;

unless another
age did, when, in
    a sky-blue vestal gown
    and ice-blue jockey cap (the stripes
        were meaningless, the sporting kings were dead) she
        rode a merry race

near Paris in the
Degas steeplechase,
    figuratively, of
    course. Vision cracked with a pin, its
        voyages at a standstill, its purposes
        exposed yet honored—

polarities that
span the world, while
    Yankee-jawed camels, the
    chariest most north-of-Boston
        types, scheme through the needle's eye to find, if not
        their proper heavens,

facsimiles there-
of. It is not
    that another couldn't
    match her method of embalming
        mirrors but that, like so much which passes for
        life in Brooklyn, she

happened there first. To
an age of art-
    ifice she brings laurels
    of artifact. How special, then,
        are these few poems of a rectitude so
        insular they will

be saved as saints are
saved whose palms bleed
    annually, because
    like the glass flowers at Harvard
        (lessons in perfect lifelessness) they are what
        they're talking about.

PEGGY BENNETT:

Two Maidens on a Seesaw

Pity poor Bell. She worked eons in the ten cent store, where under the vast ceiling stony girls terrorized their customers with their cross maps of faces. On Saturday night the mongrel hordes poured through the aisles looking for pencils and shoe laces. Their freakish faces passed like shadows on the land. Children crouched in unexpected places. Masculine women fingered hose and barked dehumanized orders. One had to watch those dark unfathomable men, they looked so poor. A flat old face appeared from under a squelched hat. The universal buzzing provoked chaos in threadbare ears. The salesgirls disregarded all except their own islands on the floor. The rest was great blobs and blurs. All that kept their lives singing was their faith in an enormous Sunday.

Every enormous Sunday Bell went to spend her hours on the beach in Custanooga. She lolled wearily, gusty with sighs, on the white grain below the rocks. Semi-nude, smoking chains of cigarettes, admiring the iridescent masses of taffeta water.

Oh, Bell was bellicose, rude, cynical, bitten, a chainsmoker, and afraid of sex. Thin, brunette, jaundiced, flashy, within she sat, within the dark passages of her imagining, and picked at the frayed cloth within her reach, while overhead the angels flew sun-ravished in the sunlight. Bell, the sun is in the storm.

Ruth was different. Ruth, who was twenty, had a proud vision of her life. These days she worked at Camp Torre, in a whirlwind of ecstasy. She dived in and out of the rows of identical, parallel barracks, speaking to the high and lowly in her beautiful mezzo voice. The days passed in a delirium. The soldiers everywhere whooped and whistled after her, but she didn't blush any more, nor spurn them, turning her backside, nor did she show the old misery of the scared young girl. She had no misery to show, only a beautiful young sad thoughtfulness now and then. The rumor was that already she had slept with Algernon, which of course was not true, certainly not of Ruth and Algernon.

Algernon took Ruth into the tawdry restaurants of Custanooga life, where they sat and told the faces of all those unwieldy lives which crossed the thresholds into the glaring smelly rooms, reading the muscles around the eyes and lips. Algernon was a sergeant in Public Relations. He teemed with reactions. He was as dark and electric as a storm. And it was grim, what they saw, when one was antagonistic; but when one radiated with love, it was beautiful and grim. Ruth shone. Algernon began to relax, to let his poisonously active mind sink into passivity. For once in his life he let himself be as idle as a pagan.

(They never analyzed their feelings into speech. Perhaps they sensed the dangers of analysis, into which omissions and false assumptions must creep,

regardless of attitude and method. And really there was no need to say, I love you. Love is an intelligence. They knew their own passion very well. In those lonely moments when no one was looking, they moved upon each other, hugged, and kissed. It was the warmth of animals and angels confused.)

But Bell was only Ruth's sister. Ruth could mourn and rejoice with her, but she could not live Bell's life.

Bell sat in the darkness of the window, throbbing with loneliness, and watched Algernon take Ruth's head in his big nervous hands and kiss her quietly, quickly, on the mouth, an awkward passionate kiss. Ruth put her hands on his flat breast and nestled her head in his shoulder for a moment. Then quickly he went away into the nebulae.

Fully ten minutes passed, during which Bell heard the toilet flush and the faucet run and the noise of Ruth's groping through the dark and silent hall, before the door noiselessly was opened. "I'm up," said Bell, in a curious flat voice which the Ile de Ruth was unprepared to notice. Ruth pursued her disrobing in the dark, so intently stripping that she ripped a slip seam on the heel of her shoe.

"Do you mind if I turn on the light?" she suddenly said, and did not wait for an answer. Bell was revealed blinking in the sudden glare, sitting in her pale blue nightgown on the edge of the wicker chair.

Bell could keep quiet no longer. "Where did you go?" she said cautiously. Her mind was morbidly eager.

"Oh," said Ruth, in a disinterested voice, through which the rapid pounding of her pulse was almost audible, "oh, to the movies, and then we took a little walk."

(The streets had been full of fear. They had paced down-town through the stricken textures of the air. The people were homing; they hurried by, anxious, pale, etched with weariness. Algernon said that he felt "cold touches of doom." They stepped carefully over a vomit on the sidewalk. The peach switches were pregnant. The setting sun was molten. The world scratched the soul, Algernon had said. He was not eclectic. He was humble. He simply could not avoid shrinking from the terrible exhaustion he sensed in human beings.

Mother and Bell had commented once, somewhat spitefully, at the noon table, that Algernon was cold, emotionless. Gradually they had come to realize that beneath the dead muscle in his face he felt so deeply that he was a little mad. Men's faces are so often inscrutable. It is a part of manhood. At the time they had all been a little mad, three women sitting like little worlds at the table.)

As she put up her hair in steel girders, meanwhile watching the process in the mirror, Ruth began talking to Bell as if Bell weren't there, but instead a polite and perfect stranger. Bell sat very still in her nightgown and listened.

"I asked Algernon what he thought about history. He thinks that history is poetry, and that poetry is science, and that science is philosophy. Algernon says truth is ephemeral, like crystals of snow, falling and melting. He says that the only hope of the world is the improvement of communications."

She said all this dreamily, as if it were the first remembering, rediscovery. Then she fell silent, thinking how the first time she saw him he had been sitting on a bench in the old Tupelo Park. He was studying a relief map of Russia printed in *Time* and had looked for a moment into space with strange lights glistening in his eyes. Then she had sensed the intensity of his glittering world. He was so unconscious of her presence that she had watched him closely almost an hour, studying him, while the other girls giggled and slapped each other and sprawled. Among the girls had been Bell, just back from a trip to New Orleans. Bell had rung a change, was being arch and ultra-wise with her bright new knowledge of last month's New Orleans. Her brother and her sister-in-law had taken her to this place and that place. She had begged them into taking her to the more lurid nightspots on the margins of town, where she had seen fairies, pansies, violets, and other human fantasies. Ruth, who had stayed home, felt an insufficiency and nameless longing, until that day she looked into that mirror of beauties that was Algernon.

Then Ruth had got this job at Camp Torre, and had become a mirror of beauties for Algernon. They both altered their shapes to fit each other, both finding each other more precious because doom was about them, and all the war years' uncertainty.

Bell sat silent on the edge of the chair. The hem of her nightgown was blackened from dragging on the floor. She said not a word, but her nerves jangled.

Ruth went on thinking how sometimes as she had walked with her lover in the obscurity of a commonfare or sat in a dark corner in Camp Torre's civilian cafeteria, Algernon had opened the theater of his mind to her, and she had looked in, scared, a little white and famished, sapped and sucked in. The repertory was as continuous as a stream.

She would have been surprised if she had known how close Bell was to imagining those same things. Oh, Bell was mixed up—skittish, proud, and twenty-eight.

They went to bed, and Ruth forgot, because there was tomorrow to make alive and great, but Bell kept thinking yesterday and other days because there was nothing for her in the yawn of tomorrow. Ever since Algernon had come into the household through Ruth, about three months ago, Bell had perceived her own mistake a thousandfold. She had often thought of marriage as a trap, because she had seen many examples of the sordid variety. Now her own sister had a precious vision and a new almost superhuman strength.

The next day Ruth, almost grudgingly, brought Bell a message from Algernon, an invitation to go with Ruth and him to the movies. Bell almost wept, she was so nervous and uncertain about accepting. "Won't I be in the way?" she quavered. She was ready when he came.

The drama was thick and heavy with dew. The orchestration featured round on round of violins, soaring melody, attacking the audience so that they could hardly breathe and their viscera had spastic reaction.

Algernon did not know what to make of Bell. She seemed to be only

amused by so much discord. He himself felt too hardboiled and seasoned to be much moved by the inhuman mannequins who moved upon the screen. But Ruth wept copiously. Of late she was much given to long spells of weeping. It made him wretched. He didn't know whether it meant change in her female physiology or not, but it tore up his composure. He bogged down.

So tonight he looked at Bell and felt overtones of sympathy go out toward her. She looked at him once, one side of her face peaked with pale light from the screen, the other in darkness, but he sensed her understanding.

When they walked home under the town lights and the dim galactic light of the Milky Way, they all were silent. Algernon was in the middle, the girls on either side.

Meanwhile between the girls communication was tenuous. Ruth vehemently wished to be alone with Algernon. There was poetry she wanted to speak. An immense soaring.

But for once Bell felt the triumphal peace, the strange light, strong like an ultra-violet, from one moment of compassion.

That night Ruth had a dream,—because of indigestion or a prophetic frame of mind?

She had walked beside the railroad tracks placed vividly upon a bluegrey bed of gravel, hand in hand with Algernon. Abruptly she was rushing after an enormous careening locomotive, crying "Algernon, Algernon! The world has left me behind."

(The next morning Bell testified to having heard her cry out, but the words had been indistinguishable.)

But Algernon had disappeared, and Ruth was alone on the deserted track. Then, in that strange delayed reaction peculiar to dreams, she realized that he was on the train.

Algernon had reached the camp at eleven o'clock that night to find his name prominent on the list of those to leave the following morning. He gasped and paled.

"Why didn't I find this out sooner?" he snapped to a nearby Captain. The Captain looked at him in awe. Algernon was frowning so tremendously the veins bulged over his temples. Then as he went toward his barracks and, finally there, sat on his bunk, stunned, his head heavy on his hands, he saw razor-sharp the horror of war. Nothing was predictable. The world did not belong to Simon Peter, nor Judas Iscariot, nor Jesus Christ. The world did not belong to Pontius Pilate, nor Nero, nor Napoleon, nor Hitler. It did not belong to any people of any time. Those great men the world remembered never lived. Egypt never was.

Someone has fooled me, he thought, gnashing his mind. Someone has made me out an idiot.

On the following day Ruth began living in a mental crouch, a spiritual suspension, and the vigil of the mails. The week passed—no mail, no mail. The second week passed, hollow and harrowing. The days were big and empty, and each mailtime was a crisis. She was keyed to Algernon's pitch, and

Algernon was vaporized. The third week passed.

Her Mama grew angry. "Oh Pshaw! Why don't you straighten up and quit moping!" she would snap and scold. But Ruth just waited, pale, breathing with difficulty, sunken in the chairs, closing her eyes wearily. Her appetite had been whisked away, her appetite for food and for other action.

Bell had dull blunt comments to make, but Ruth was too numbed by despair to hear them. "Well, if he'd loved you," Bell might remark sourly, "he'd have written."

Algernon? Algernon watched the visible bombardment of the skies. Algernon was in a shallow trench. Algernon had mud on his face. He was tired. His belly trembled and disgorged food came to sour his mouth. He swallowed it again.

Algernon never thought of Ruth, nor of his father or brothers or his neurotic mother, nor of any of those vagaries, save as nightmares, fantastic exaggerations. His past life was incredible. The present possessed the horror of the only truth.

Algernon was sick with restraint. He wanted to love. Love a child or a puppy, an old man, or a young woman, and suddenly human beings appeared so unlovesome. To put his lips to lips, his flesh to warm magnetic flesh, to possess, to feel and fondle, mold in his mold, peace on peace.

Time had grown shapeless, as enigmatic as the Sphinx, sometimes seeming insane and often meaningless. How could Algernon write? He was only the remote shadow of the Algernon who had lived and was so wonderful, if he could ever find him again.

Then that night in Tarantula Algernon got killed by a booby trap. Oh, the monotony of it.

After receiving word from the War Department Ruth tried several times to enlist in the WACS, but each time was rejected for minor ailments: kidney trouble, low blood pressure, etc. etc. She would leave the recruiting office in a fever of exasperation. She had become so proud and skittish no one at home could touch her with a ten-foot pole. She fretted when her mother crashed her teeth through an apple while she read *McCall's Magazine*. She fretted at Bell. Her words were poisonous off her waspish tongue.

Bell was unbelievably happy these days. She had a new job with the Post Engineers at Camp Torre and life had a new intensity, new meanings and faces. She was getting a higher wage than ever before, and there were men about, young gallant men. Ruth was only Bell's sister. Bell could mourn and rejoice with Ruth, but she could not live Ruth's life.

S. RAIZISS:

Rooftree Rent Free

Pity acts most casual to pride
Where wounds of has-beens show through threadbare
Motley. Resigned from last jobs of bread
Some fantasy becomes their final trade:
From minor glories sifted down to ashes
They pleasure in the common reading-room
Whose invitations for the year's at-home
Are silent and impersonal and gracious,
Whose fabulous refectory and stairs
Afford a daily sunday-time and genteel
Width to single fugitives from feeling.
So is the welcome honorable here that cares
Not how the passing guests' outlandish faith
Employs their hearts, researching into death.

The False Dolores

Born from wayward seeds of human trouble
She moves like this along the withered shore
Of the world's map, walks whenever spoil
The singing shells and lighthouse eyes and more

Than these. The woman needs your brains for bread,
Brothers, takes her salt from generations
Of your tears. Will you believe her word
That mourns skeletons of final patience?

Some day she means to take to suicide
And sentimental for tomorrow
And faithful to your pulse for her sake
Should next renounce the sweetness of your marrow.

Meanwhile she lives on you, parasite
On pity: the sea sirens in her throat,
The octopus is curling through her iris,
Her face reports the breaking of your boat.

Crying meanwhile like any soft girl
For tender objects and the sun's dirge,
Touched by the passion of a great applause
Marvels at comedy or public purge,

Oh weeps because the winter horse is old
And this time breaks his knees against the ice,
Because the hearse is frequent now and rattles
Death's winnings like a set of dice,

Flushed with guilt to see the spittle shine
On drunken lips gone daft with loneliness,
Forlorn streets where fat laughter follows
Tricks of rhinestone and certified success.

And she who winces with the tambourine
Begging at her conscience, hurt by strokes
Of irony that light up Mamlok's grief:
She is the hostess of the hoax—

You used her name at Paris Rome Madrid
Who stuck a medal through your breast,
Hung ribbons on the brave obsessed,
Rachitic rosaries upon the young.

You've played incestuous lover long enough
In sea and grass—let her not borrow
You again and leave the bone bare,
The eyes stark to your half-sister sorrow.

John Donne Today

Hoist with the soul's whole strain
The tight trapdoor to Donne's brain,
And subtly risk the logical stairs
Asserting the doctor's passionate gloom.
Here in the thinking room
The shadows still correct with care
The sun's abstractions either side of noon;
Here resolve the meanings of sleek hair,
Mental mirrors, alchemies come true,
Sardonic bones at prayer
That quote centuries of you;
So follow the spiral spirit thwarting time
And gathering converts in a red room:
They study love's intense curriculum
And taste God's blood upon the air . . .
And hazard the vivid sport
Of flesh on concept, winding
Argument with Jack and John—who finds
One Sense within the double mortal.

HAROLD G. MILLER:

The Esophagus-Hold

Our lady
who dances the emptiness
keeps an unworried look
in her vowel-silhouettes . . .
She runs
an orange-blur wild
in her bowlegged stumbling . . .
And moves Desire
in a revolving door . . .

She lips color garbage:
a crumpled blouse:
the penny permission for madness . . .
And her crisscrossed-underneath
is fed with blood: bones: and arteries . . .
The playerpiano throb of Chopsticks.

Poem

Thoughts that lie too deep for tears.
—Wordsworth

Oh, tell me,
Tell me,
My mind—
You game leg
Running in the muck—
Tell me:
Do you remember
The nights
We stood and watched
The ravens fly
Against the moon's watery brain;
When I fled
Your eye,
A claw of agate,
The sculpturing sea-creature's
Eye of Sin?

Oh, tell me,
Tell me,
My mind:
Have you kept memory,
That folded accordian
Of nightmares,
Open, open
To exploration yet
By me . . .
And Death?

Poem

Lost, wholly lost, without an inward fire.
—Santayana

Say you never saw them
Upon the quick etching of raft,
Near the river's edge,
Like fat spiders
Probing your dreams
for
The enlarged glands
Of landscape,
The long spine chancre of landscape
Shattering the duskclay
Washbasin of sky . . .

Say you never saw them
Descend the neurotic anemones of bright bridgelamps,
The applegreen scabs of bridgelamps,
The applegreen scabs on a greener scalp
Your fingers painted in lewd soap
Told disease.
Say you never heard them,
Saw them, felt them—
Even name never came to face or bones—
But add:
It was something frightening I hid last night.
The dream I've eaten into the erogenous.
It was something horrid!
This morning I report
My head was numb with morose blood.

RADCLIFFE SQUIRES:

Prince Edward's Island

There is singing over the water,
Music of heartbreak and the treachery
Of mere living. As the tide turns,
The ships veer at anchor,
The sound of singing turns,
And Jupiter, like an apparition,
Spunks the eastern morning.
The tide and ships
Turn again, and the meager gulls
Veer from the scurrying nightfall.

Waves that tremble beneath
The piers, or swells that break the harbor
Tell nothing beyond the restlessness.
Wreckage, annelidic wood, rot
And divulgent ends of pipe,
All seaward looking, all common
At the shore line, say nothing
Beyond the division and the change.
And even the singing that moves in
From the water—tinkle of ageless
Shell, soft note of the rolling, rounding
Moonstone, commiseration of
Wave upon wave—
Asserts that nothing ends with an empire
And nothing begins with a prince.

That much is logically true.
Still I remember once at sea
The guffaw of ice stampeded
Into ice, the soprano of wind reeded
Upon the fluted ocean, and the
Shuddering world of caverns
And flying plains. And when it
Seemed that this was death itself,
I beheld in a whorling meadow,
Couched amid foam flowers, a white
Seal, his eyes quietly mine.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS:

PARKER TYLER: *The Granite Butterfly*. Bern Porter (Berkeley, Calif.)

It is interesting to me to attempt to recover my reasons for saying, as I did after I had read Parker Tyler's poem in nine cantos, *The Granite Butterfly,* that it is the best poem written by an American since *The Waste Land*—certainly by far the best long poem of our day. Perhaps I had better have said, the first long poem by an American that has managed to emerge since the sweet blight of *The Waste Land*. Few poems since that catastrophe have reattained the vigorous insight into what was being attempted here up to that day. Tyler somehow, by a very devious route, has come about to resail that old and very promising course. So I believe. To me his poem is an event of major significance.

The possibility of a poem's being written in America, a major poem taking its context from direct experience, has been strongly forwarded by Tyler's poem. It is an impulse to write well resumed here. A resumption of the will to write, to recover from the materials their innate relatedness—with respect to the mind at the full, the alert, instructed mind that thus begins once more to clothe itself in suitable manner here.

To be a poem a writing must have two movements, from outside inward and from inside out. The movement must be generated from the nature of the material and the material must take its structure from the emotion, the quality of the driving person behind it. Successfully it must be as whole as a horse leaping a ditch—and much the same, the horse, by the way, has always been associated with the poem.

To try then to discover why I think Parker Tyler's poem is important—to rediscover the reasons for my instinctive liking for the work—it is a whole: it moves like a horse or like any living thing of swiftness and weight, it is all of itself. The verse takes its élan from the material and the material has the same resiliency, solidness of thought, as the pliant lines.

The verse is as immediate, as intelligent as the very unencumbered thought: nothing is imitating anything except *within* the poem where everything imitates everything else—it moves together to go from here to there. And it does go. You do not have the feeling of intrusive meanings pushed on the sense by a hangover of form. You do not have an irrationality of form tearing down the sense. It is inventive, spontaneously adjusted part to part, and gives that feeling of resiliency because it is all one animal. All one poem newly made, deftly formed part to part. I do not think Tyler hesitated one moment in writing it. It is an end result of honesty and instruction—at its best.

This is something not easy to get. It comes of the blossoming of an environment. We are all too prone to distrust our instinctive judgments and belittle our pleasures. We do not believe that *we* shall ever do anything good. And we shan't—unless we are able and instructed. Unless we practice, unless we see many varieties, English, Russian, French, Balinese, Argentine. We've got to be in a position to have observed everything. But once we have established our consciousness and exercised our talents, the time must come when we too shall attempt to take off—in our own right—and fly.

And when we do, every part of our equipment as well as the courage and intelligence behind our venture must be interrelated in the machine, the poem which signalizes our success.

This is one of the few recent poems that attempt to fly of their own resources, interrelated to be a functional whole—of any first-rate quality of thought.

Do I exaggerate? Perhaps. But not in my major thesis that this is the *kind* of thing we must do to succeed. And that this is a new courage and a new success—for this succeeds in being pleasurable. Little verse is pleasurable.

To come down to a final definitive statement—I know of no poet in America (or elsewhere at the moment) who has composed into a poem evidence of a mind as

untrammeled by the hish-hash of conventional beliefs, as alert and informed as Parker Tyler shows in this poem. Come at it as he may have done, by what devious courses, either by heredity or by accident—all these things mean nothing at all—he has arrived at a status of adulthood as a modern being. All others, at the moment, seem maimed to me beside him: most sound as if they were not above the newspaper level. It isn't, mind you, the intelligence alone; it is the ripened awareness of the tentative putting forth of new leaves in the world, the man. This is the first pleasure in the poem. It is not "special pleading" as all second-rate art is, it is enlightening, nourishing. A poem must nourish the whole man. First by the comprehensive, the responsiveness in the new and the newly opened, behind it. Couple this quality of mind, of the man (in a poem) to the second awareness, the awareness of the newly won in technical elaboration, the escape from the tawdriness of the dead line and trope to an unfettered freedom of metrical resources, couple these two and you have the *makings* at least of a great poem. It doesn't matter so much what is specifically "said" in the poem, it is what is really expressed *overall* in the poem as a single thing, a single enlightenment in the very fibre of the poem, the poem itself, that is the only and full meaning. The mind and the skill, the enlightened mind that has discovered the waking moment of the world which it inhabits and the ability to give new clothes, new voice to that morning of the world—the poem itself. That is what this poem of Tyler means to me, that is why I admire it. That it has dull moments, conditioned by certain special qualities of the poet's mind and consequent skills, is of no importance. It has defects but it is for all that "right." It walks, it jumps, it snorts and . . . it is the animal moving.

An analysis of the poem might go something like this: Well, here's a study for you. I suppose it's synecdochic, metonymic—logical? But neither metaphoric nor ironic surely—the reduction of a predicament, an intellectual predicament, to terms not easy to nail down.

Well, to begin again, what does it dramatize?—for it appears to be a dramatization, emotive, a dramatic poem—with a hero, a possible hero (the Granite Butterfly), a hero of specific qualities sufficiently important to the poet to present as a major work.

Personally I don't give a damn who. I take little pleasure in ideas unless they are translated to me through the emotions—which take their place. So here we are back again where we started.

Well, emotion is what I'm seeking—let the rest go. What sort of emotion is to be discovered here?

It's an icy sort of consternation, a stony sort of butterfly—not necessarily a paradoxical situation if you consider that rock is as transient a chemical as flesh is, as a wing is: a butterfly wing. We live in an age when matter generally is known to be just force frozen, if Einstein knows what he is talking about.

So we have the figure of a stone butterfly (even before we read the poem)—the most fragile identified with the most naturally enduring (certain metals, crystals are more enduring than granite though granite is more massive in the world): there's your metonymy, your reduction.

Well, but the emotion: that's emotion at its peak, its tragic peak—the granite butterfly. Now fracture that into the interrelated parts of a poetic composition and you'll have your answer. Every poet (poem?) partakes of the whole and *represents* (synecdoche) the whole and the whole is no more, cannot be more, than its parts.

The poem, if it is emotion, is to move us—or it isn't a work of art. Move us to what?

We are moved to feel, we are moved to feel shame at our own clothes, at the food we put in our mouths to live (why?), at all the snug little warmths we pack about our fearful carcasses (and therefore souls: transubstantiation) against the horrible cold of the world and its ideas that inhabit it and us.

Shall we accept this attack upon our defeat and our self-protectiveness? With pleasure? Is the poem that good? That humble?

No, I don't think it is humble. That would be my first objection. It is destructive to the pettiness of our moods—but it is not reassuring. Not in the faintest degree reassuring.

If it's read—and is a work of art—then it is to be read with pleasure (the pyramid is the test: bottom to top). What pleasure? A pleasure of self-abasement before the granite butterfly.

Are we all not just that? We believe in our persistence, everything we do proclaims this—that we do anything proclaims it. We are, at our imagined best, important—important enough to write.

All right, the granite butterfly is man—or rather, art. *I. e.,* Man. It is that artist, man, untorn by the expanding universe. Or is it? It is, definitely, so intended: synecdochic.

But is it good writing? Its affection of the distortions of the present writing mood is not always to its advantage. Compare the much more complete contours of Pound's early cantos—the much richer texture of his lines. Would Tyler agree to this? Certainly. This is a moderner verse—void, almost entirely void of metaphor (its absence recently so well pointed out as a feature of modern poetry by Taupin, see *The Quarterly Review of Literature:* Fall 1945 issue). This verse of Tyler's is much more lithe, much leaner than anything Pound ever did. Its sheer metaphor is nowhere near the color of Pound's passages. But this is correct, as it should be.

This verse is much more modern than Pound.

The artist sets forth from his mother's womb—a Genesis—without much light. That's the modern of it, rather its antithesis "blind." Listening to the "black music." The identity of the sexes—"all one cloud." Good. Very modern (Athenian!) but well used here.

In this part great pleasure of the reading (pp. 10 to 11).

Yes, "interlude of the blood." I take back what I said about no humility. There is even humbleness: "Desire to tell everything." Well, go ahead. *"It is only time that moves."* Not the stranded butterfly. No motion there?

The humility of the confession, that is not a confession, but the image of a confession that moves us *in the writing* even though it does not take place: which it should not do. I enjoy the writing beginning, "No. Each wrinkle of inspiration," etc.

The "landscape" in the next part is well placed. Good unemotional (faked) landscape too. Landscape for itself (I hope). Hobbema? Not much color. Distance. This whole scheme synecdochic? I avoid another term of commoner descent—a very happy scene: the past, childhood? Is all this before the catastrophe? Confessional. Fine stuff.

I don't get the Negro "Oedipus" though (at this point). Son to whom? To kill what father, marry what mother? This comes out later.

With the next section, "Portrait," the artist comes into his own: he recognizes himself as himself. But is this Shakespeare or himself he is drawing? Or both? (Compare with the ensuing description Shakespeare's drawing of the stallion in *Venus and Adonis.*) The following detailed description of a man is special stuff, not so good. The interest slumps—stopped, luckily, just at the point of indifference. Not suggestive of Leonardo, Masaccio (?) as it would seem to pretend—the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel. Not "informed" enough.

The whole of the "Metamorphosis" is excellent—of the best. It is this sort of writing that clinches the matter for me.

The somewhat obscure image of the pyramids juxtaposed, peak to peak, is very interesting when we oppose the two incidents of the rape of the white woman by the Negro who has beaten up her lover—or husband?—and the rise of the serfs who take over the Count, Alexei Escutonoff, and his wife.

This juxtaposition of two lurid stories is a very interesting literary feat: very artificial, very real at the same time and—the two pyramids—a trope that might be described as allegorical overlay. But at the same time—it lets in the light.

This is worth studying for the light it throws on Tyler's mind. It is a poetical device, a literary strategy by which he snares the reader's attention, the vulgar reader one

might say, and by the accuracy, the honesty, of the comparisons manages so that he is able to "say" many things in his poem that could not be said otherwise.

It may be that the last scene is too violent—that Tyler has forgotten himself and turned the poem into a tricky melodrama. I don't believe this. I think it is deliberate, that it belongs to the poem, and, in fact, lets the granite butterfly flutter its wings very excitingly.

ROBERT RICHMAN:

JOHN CROWE RANSOM: *Selected Poems.* Knopf.

The evidence these poems present is very significant: here is a poet who, in an age of endless experiment with the craft, the attitude, the inner conflicts, and with subconscious poetry, has kept strictly to his own theory and practice. Not that this is weak. On the contrary, it is a strong poet indeed who can be contemporary with Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Crane and yet not be of their traditions—any more than of the watered-down tradition of Tennysonian, Bridgean, or Georgian imitators. Then, when that strong poet becomes a separatist and masters his own craft, an individualist to be reckoned with appears, for he will have built well rather than differently as have so many writers on the modern fringes of poetry.

If such building is from the right stuff, a Ransom appears. The poems become a symbol of the poet's attitude towards poetry. And they are the work of a master craftsman. Ransom's attitude is as resolute as it is, I feel, because he has made the bridge in the tradition of verse from Dryden, Swift, and Pope to the 1920's. The bridge is over a logical river: his age of reason and the other have the same necessity to give order to the demons and disorders, and myth to confusions. The bridge is not so much in style, not so much in idea, but much in the attitude of the maker toward materials. Hence, perfection in form (not *gestalt* but prosody, image, language, and idea, all in order), and the desire he has to let the form become the emotional communication and the meaning.

Moreover, the attitude makes the craftsman, for he has to arrange order with small boundaries—look at the boundaries the other workers in the modern guild have never recognized. Thus by shutting off dislocation, clustering, sprung-rhythming; musical line, cadence line; prose stress, prose-meter accents, syllabic counts, Ransom limited himself to the tougher wielding of metrics in the classical English manner. He lets the right word in the right meter unveil the meaning at the right time. There are many lines of proof: "And the little groin of the knight was spilled by a stone" or "Girls that have unlawful dreams / Will waken full of their own screams." But the stanzas add the proof of context. Many could be offered for illustration—from "Spiel of the Three Mountebanks," "Necrological," "Winter Remembered," "Prelude to an Evening," "Painted Head," "Man without a Sense of Direction," "Somewhere Is Such a Kingdom." Let these from "The Equilibrists" do:

> Body: it was a white field ready for love.
> On her body's field, with the gaunt tower above,
> The lilies grew, beseeching him to take,
> If he would pluck and wear them, bruise and break.
>
> Eyes talking: Never mind the cruel words,
> Embrace my flowers, but not embrace the swords.
> But what they said, the doves came straightway flying
> And unsaid: Honor, Honor, they came crying.
>
> Importunate her doves. Too pure, too wise
> Clambering on his shoulder, saying, Arise,
> Leave me now, and never let us meet,
> Eternal distance now command thy feet.

Predicament indeed, which thus discovers
Honor among thieves, Honor between lovers.
O such a little word is Honor, they feel.
But the grey word is between them cold as steel.

Besides the fine focus on image and situation, the soft inner chamber music and the superbly right words *(field, ready, tower, grew, bruise, wear, embrace the swords, little, grey word, between)* it is evident, too, that Ransom sacrifices the unmistakably natural flow of English music for his Trappist-monk devotion to his craft. Often a line is made to sing: "Eternal distance now command thy feet." Often a word is whipped into obedience: "Beneath the blue ogive of the firmament," "You in your peignoir . . . ," "Rehearses his pink paradigm, to yap." It is unfair to pull these from their poems, as bad lines, but I wanted to show the craftsman making a word too obedient. Yet often the word, Stevens-strange, gives the illusion of having arrived there in the line out of some serio-comic necessity.

Ransom's poetry also has the neo-classical essay flavor, though the poems do not tackle any of the demons or ideologies which have so convinced us in Crane, Eliot and Joyce. No search, no mythmaking; yet certainly there is no miniaturing as in the early Stevens. But I cannot say, unless I guess, why the whole of Ransom's poetry is not more than the sum of the poems. This is the guess: in this century the world-view of a poet is as significant as his attitude towards poetry and his craft and his care; and he must seek a polity, an ethic and a metaphysics, not so much taken from a reasoned system as beaten into a metalwork that protects the windows opened in the mind of man by Freud, Marx, the Physicists and Internationalists. Though I do feel that Ransom achieves a splendid ordering within his poems, it is not enough to satisfy all man's need for order. But it is obvious that the larger world orders can succeed only when great hordes of men have as fine a craftsman sense of order as Ransom's. (It seems somehow similar to James.)

The order, the attitude, the craft: there is no argument with a man who chooses to be an artist of Kouroo instead of a Joyce or an Eliot.

CONTRIBUTORS

PEGGY BENNETT lives in Apalachicola, Florida, and had just had her first novel accepted.

BERTOLT BRECHT, the noted playwright and poet, left Germany in 1933 and has since lived in Denmark, Finland, and America. Reynal and Hitchcock has announced the publication of his collected writings in translation.

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BEN FIELD'S newest novel is *Piper Tomkins.*

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